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An exploration of how childminders engage in reflection with others and become reflective practitioners

Doctor of Education (EdD)

The Open University

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ABSTRACT

There is recent research (Cable and Goodliff, 2010; Paige-Smith and Craft, 2008a; Cooper, 2010) within the same general contexts as this thesis, but limited research bringing these contexts together and none focusing specifically on childminders and their particular issues of both working in isolation for much of their day-to-day practice and low status (real or perceived); and then the impact of these factors on whom they reflect with, and how they reflect on, their practice.

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the reflective practices of nineteen childminders studying a distance-learning Foundation Degree in Early Years. Data collection methods include questionnaires, semi-structured telephone interviews and e-mail correspondence.

The research questions aim to explore: childminders' understanding of reflective practice and how this changes during their studies, the range of factors involved in engaging in effective reflection on practice and the decisions childminders make in deciding whom to reflect with, and the impact of professional identity on reflective practice.

The main findings from this research reveal a shift in reflective practices as the childminders gain in knowledge and skills as a result of their studies. It is unsurprising that the childminders reflect with others, given that the FDEY promotes the importance of reflection with others. However, the data shows the childminders not only gain an understanding of the value and benefits of reflecting on practice but this awareness prompts significant changes in whom the

childminders seek to reflect with, bringing with it a need to align themselves with a different community of practice as their professional identity develops.

For those facilitating reflective opportunities, and those engaging in reflection, this research draws attention to the importance, of understanding the factors impacting on reflective practices, and the potentially transforming nature of reflective practice on professional identity.

Glossary of terms and acronyms

Term or acronym	Definition
AL	Associate Lecturer
Childcarer	A person who works with other people in a childcare setting outside of their own home, such as a nursery or pre-school.
Childminder	This term has been used throughout to refer to registered childminders. A childminder is a childcare professional who works in their own home caring for other people's children (NCMA, 2009b).
Childminding Network	A childminding network is made up of a group of registered childminders, supported by a network coordinator.
CMC (Computer Mediated Conferencing)	In the context of E115 this involves the students in an online forum activity 'wearing hats' in which they take on roles relating to theories of learning. Students reflect on responses to a case study with other TGF members.
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
Distance learning	This has been defined as a way of learning that encompasses the following characteristics: separation of teacher and learner in time and space, use of mixed-media courseware, two-way communication (either synchronous or asynchronous) (Commonwealth of Learning, 2000), alongside the possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials.
ECA	End-of-course assessment
EYCLOs (Early Years Core Learning Outcomes)	These encompass the knowledge and skills underpinning effective early years practice students should be able to demonstrate by the end of the FDEY, as set down in the Statement of Requirement for the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree (DfES, 2001).
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
FDEY	Foundation Degree in Early Years
First Class	A system for receiving emails and accessing module forums. It can be used by students to access module information, post (and read) contributions from others studying the same module or programme of study.
Foundation Degree	Foundation Degrees are vocational qualifications (and embrace a number of professions within study disciplines), designed to integrate academic study with work-based learning. Located within the Intermediate level of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), they were introduced in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2000 with the aim of enabling adults to continue working while studying for a higher level qualification. Foundation Degrees are recognised as an award equivalent to level 5 (of 8) within the National Qualification Framework (QCA, 2006). They are equivalent to the first two years of

	higher education study.
Modules within The Open University FDEY	E123 Working with children in the early years E124 Supporting children's learning in the early years E115 Personal professional development: early years settings E215 Extending personal professional development ED209 Child development U212 Childhood K204 Working with children and families E230 Ways of knowing: language, mathematics and science in the early years E243 Inclusive education: learning from each other
Framework for Higher Education Qualifications	The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) has been designed by the higher education sector, and describes all the main higher education qualifications, including Foundation Degrees.
National Qualifications Framework (QCA, 2006)	The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) sets out the level at which a qualification can be recognised in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.
NCMA	National Childminding Association
Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills)	Ofsted inspect and regulate care for children and young people, and inspect education and training for learners of all ages.
OU	Open University
PEF (Practice Evidence File)	Students on the OU FDEY work-based learning modules build a file documenting evidence of personal practice to demonstrate their breadth of knowledge, skills and expertise against professional practice learning outcomes.
PVI sector	Private, Voluntary and Independent sector
RPC (Reflective Practice Cycle)	The RPC consists of four stages and focuses on the practicalities of work-based enquiry – thinking about, exploring, reflecting on and documenting practice. It is used throughout E115 as students are asked to think about and explore different areas of practice in the three main themes of the module (see Appendix 4)
SSRP	Student Research Project Panel
Three-layer model	This framework illustrates a process to develop ideas, challenge assumptions, and reflect on what practitioners do. It offers a visual representation of the process of thinking about personal developing practice and the 'practitioner' that you find there. (see Appendix 4)
TMA	Tutor marked assignment
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The purpose of this initial chapter is to set out the background to the study and explain its relevance to current practice, and to provide information that will enable the reader to locate the researcher within the research and identify any potential for bias. In addition, definitions of key concepts are provided, along with the key questions and a framework for the thesis.

‘Childminders are likely to be our least successful students.’ (Open University central academic discussing the first cohort of students to study the OU FDEY)

Inspectors have judged 9% of childminders to be offering outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage provision.’ (Ofsted, 2009)

‘Outstanding providers told us that reflective practice is crucial to their success.’ (Ofsted, 2009)

‘Intrapersonal reflection may offer opportunities for deep learning, but is ultimately not enough to promote transformative learning.’ (Brockbank et al, 2002)

‘I’m just a childminder; I have a lot of experience but I don’t see myself as a professional.’ (Childminder embarking on the FDEY)

‘The traditional image of a childminder is changing. More of them are making it a career of choice.’ (Andalo, 2012) (Guardian columnist)

These statements typify the assumptions, observations, and views of many childminder students themselves, some Open University module team members and those who are working with, or writing about, childminders or reflection in a

professional capacity. They also lie behind my rationale for carrying out research into childminders and reflective practice.

The quality of early years provision has been on the political agenda since 1997 – see ‘background to the study’ within this chapter. With the large majority of providers of early years provision being childminders – 56,085 childminders against 25,835 other forms of childcare (Ofsted, 2012) - it is important that childminders are able to offer quality care and education. With evidence from the longitudinal Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) research project (Sylva and Taylor, 2006) indicating a clear correlation between the level of qualification of staff and the quality of the provision, and reflective practice key to quality (Ofsted, 2009), it is essential that childminders are able to successfully achieve the FDEY and become reflective practitioners.

It is a well-known phenomenon that children (and adults) perform to expectations (Eye of the Storm, 1970; Blue Eyed, 1996). Although childminders are not directly discriminated against, in that they are eligible to enrol for the FDEY and have the same access to the module materials and forums as other students, the lack of understanding as to the specific difficulties childminders, as lone workers, have in making best use of these can lead to indirect and unintended discrimination. The FDEY student forums contain a plethora of posts by childminders commenting that activity instructions or examples of practice within the module materials do not make it easy for them to reflect on their practice. They bemoan the fact that activities frequently expect students to reflect on practice with others (Appendix 4), but as childminders they do not have easy access to others to reflect with. They also make comments that their set up is very different to that of other childcarers

working in group-based settings, making it difficult at times to apply examples of practice to their own situation. These forum posts suggest those childminders working and studying in isolation who are not naturally reflective, and have not yet acquired the skills to apply discussion of one context to another context, are not sufficiently supported to reflect on their practice and to do well in their studies.

The perception – noted in the quotes at the start of this chapter - of childminders as non-professionals and as less academically successful is a pervasive one, despite the percentage of childminders judged as offering outstanding provision (Ofsted, 2009), and childminding becoming more of a career choice (Andalo, 2012) than a short-term income generator while a childminder's children are young. Anecdotal evidence gathered from my attendance at co-ordination meetings relating to the marking of the examinable component of the module (EMA) for the FDEY modules I am involved in, indicated a general consensus (in my opinion) among the module teams that childminders do less well in assessment. In other words, childminders are being assumed to show limited *ability* to reflect on their practice.

This perception can have a negative impact on how well childminders achieve in their studies. If childminders in general are performing to expectations then module teams and tutors are not faced with concerns that the reasons for this may relate to the design of the teaching materials or opportunities for engagement with others. Instead there is an implicit assumption that achievement levels are due to the calibre of childminders on the FDEY. Even childminders themselves often see themselves as less likely to do well because they are 'only a childminder' and I have had several childminders stay relatively silent within tutorials or online forums

because they do not feel 'qualified' or 'equal enough' to engage in discussions involving reflection on practice. These issues can result in inequality within the study experience as well as longer-term consequences for becoming an effective reflective practitioner.

The FDEY is a work-based learning qualification and, as such, reflection is a key component of the assessment criteria. It is therefore important to address the inequality factors that can impact on effective reflection on practice. However, some childminders are able to be successful in their studies, and achieve well, despite the not inconsiderable challenges they face as a lone practitioner in reflecting on their practice. By investigating how childminders doing distance learning study can engage in reflection with others and become a reflective practitioner I hope to challenge perceptions of childminding students in general and identify strategies to enable all childminders to have the opportunity to fully engage with the reflective opportunities afforded within the FDEY programme and achieve their degree, and establish reflective practices that can be sustained in the longer term.

The impetus for a focus on reflection and distance-learning within this thesis comes from my growing awareness over 25 years of tutoring of the value of reflecting on practice, alongside a career move to working on distance-learning modules and the expectation within these that part of the student learning experience involves using reflection to determine the effectiveness of their practice. The focus on childminders stems from my own experiences as a tutor that indicates the negative assumption of childminders as unsuccessful students is not entirely borne out by the facts. Childminders are frequently among my higher

achieving FDEY students; they show depth of reflection on their practice within assignments and are able to effectively self-reflect and instigate changes to practice as a result. As a member of the work-based learning module teams within The Open University, I have also noted that childminders are often consistently represented within the 'distinction' band on the work-based learning modules in the FDEY, suggesting that success can be independent of any potential bias or input by an individual tutor.

Small scale research for my final MA module E835 *Educational Research in Action*, looking at some of the issues raised by childminders around reflecting on their practice, indicated reflection needs others to be effective. The research I had been introduced to as part of my studies did not rule out solo reflection, but suggested that it is not enough to promote transformative learning. I therefore began to question how some childminders can be successful students and 'outstanding' childminders (Ofsted, 2009), when they work and study in isolation.

Enabling early years practitioners to develop their knowledge and understanding of what they do and improve practice is a driving force for my role as a tutor. Alongside this I have a personal desire to encourage childminders to believe themselves to be part of the community of professional childcarers. The ability to reflect on practice and become a reflective practitioner is recognized as being central to developing practice (DCSF, 2008a) and, as noted in my data analysis in Chapter 5, being seen as a professional by other professionals.

BIOGRAPHY

I have taken the view that the researcher's identity, and personal values and beliefs 'affect the production and analysis of qualitative data' (Denscombe, 2007:301). It is, therefore, important to provide some brief biographical details at the outset to declare my positionality (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002:24) and allow the reader to take into account any bias there may be within the study as a result of my own background and position on childminding. In addition, it is helpful to note where I am on the insider-outsider continuum (Le Gallais, 2008:151) to understand any influences on the data collected (Appendix 9).

I have been involved in childminding for almost thirty years as both a childminder and a bespoke trainer. Within these roles I have chaired a County Childminding Association and championed childminding as a viable and positive alternative to full-daycare for parents looking for high-quality care (DCSF, 2010), . My current roles as an Associate Lecturer (AL) and member of the early years central academic team bring me into contact with childminders studying on The Open University Foundation Degree in Early Years, but I am removed from direct practice.

My insider perspective, not only provided me with an insight into, and understanding of, issues and the feasibility of any suggestions for action but it also meant that childminders were more likely to trust me to put across their perspective and, therefore, more willing to talk to me. I am aware that how I view childminding within the childcare profession may be visible within this study and the issues of bias and validity within my research have been discussed within Chapter 4 on research design. Part of Chapter 4 will also focus on any issues

emanating from my role, the 'insider – outsider' issue and my relationship with the childminders used within this study, and childminders in general.

POLICY BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

To set my study in the context of the external environment, the election of a Labour government in 1997 brought with it an unprecedented, co-ordinated expansion in early years services, including both statutory provision and provision within the PVI sector. The Labour government embraced the ethos of prestigious reports from the early 1990s, such as the Rumbold Report 'Starting with Quality' (DES, 1990) and the views of those involved in the Early Childhood Forum (Pugh, 2010). For the first time there was a considerable injection of public funding into childcare provision and a commitment to increasing the accessibility of good quality childcare through increased training opportunities for *all* practitioners and services involved in the care and education of young children. For those working within the field, this environment brought with it a noticeable move towards all forms of childcare being seen as equally valid, as well as low cost qualificatory training irrespective of childcare role and meant that, for the first time, childminders had the opportunity to gain the same higher level qualifications within the childcare field as other childcare practitioners.

The Foundation Degree - a two-year, vocational higher education qualification intended for experienced practitioners across different sectors of employment - was introduced at the start of the 21st Century as part of the Labour government's widening participation targets for higher education, and to meet the skills shortages at the 'higher technician' and 'associate professional' levels (DfES, 2004). The Foundation Degree in Early Years (FDEY) (see Appendix 1) offers

childminders and other childcare workers an opportunity to gain relevant theoretical knowledge and skills and to apply these to practice. Two of its key aims relate to reflection:

to develop students' self-awareness and reflection,
including the ability to evaluate their effect on other people
and in the environment in which they work
and
to develop students as reflective practitioners, with an
understanding of the need for and commitment to lifelong
learning

(Taken from the Statement of Requirements, DfES, 2001, p16)

For childminders who generally did not hold higher education qualifications, yet had a wealth of experience with children, the introduction of the Foundation Degree offered another opportunity to gain professional status by building on practical knowledge and developing their theoretical knowledge, skills and expertise.

The professionalisation of the early years workforce has been one of the key outcomes emanating from the Labour government's wider reform, and integration of children's services first enshrined in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003). More recently, with the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008b) and the Labour government's vision for 2020 (DCSF, 2008c), there is an expectation that *all* who work with children should become reflective practitioners. Alongside this, childminding has become more

professional in that childminders are expected to work within regulatory frameworks, be suitably qualified and reflect on their practice (Cable and Miller, 2008:172-3). Childminders are also being encouraged to join networks and become more involved in delivering childcare initiatives (Evans, 2004; DCSF, 2010). These initiatives require them to become quality assured, have their practice monitored, and engage in a 'continuous cycle of self evaluation, improvement and reflection' (DCSF, 2008a:6), in order to improve their services.

Despite this encouragement to become more professional, childminders do not *need* any specific qualifications (Ofsted, 2010) and not all are involved in delivering childcare initiatives. However, many childminders make a conscious decision to undertake qualificatory training beyond the basic minimum registration requirements (Nicholson et al, 2008; NCMA, 2008) for a variety of reasons. In my experience as an AL, childminders on the OU FDEY often belong to a childminding network and undertake additional training to meet the requirements for accreditation, of continual professional development (NCMA, 2009c), or have personal career ambitions. That there is a divide within the childminding profession between those childminders who (merely) meet the minimum requirements for registration and those who exceed them is important to note as a possible factor when determining a reflective partner (see Chapter 5).

To effectively reflect on, and improve, practice it is necessary to have appropriate theoretical knowledge, practice skills and an understanding of reflection and how it enhances practice (Evans, 2002:19). My experience of tutoring over the years, and particularly on The Open University Foundation Degree in Early Years (FDEY) where reflection is an integral part of the modules, suggests that students'

awareness of reflection, and how to engage in it, is heightened by study.

Embarking on study provides practitioners with access to tools to enhance and broaden their professional knowledge, skills and expertise through reflection, as well as others to reflect with. However, my tutoring experiences suggest that the ability to reflect on practice often does not come naturally and practitioners may need support and encouragement to use the tools and effectively reflect. Although this can apply to all early years practitioners, childminders have additional challenges to overcome, particularly around accessibility of others to reflect with and perceptions of their professionalism.

Whether childminders are choosing to undertake study for their own professional development, or whether they are encouraged to do so as part of their involvement in childcare initiatives, there are growing numbers of childminders accessing higher education and embarking on a Foundation Degree. Traditional training options, through a college, are, however, notoriously difficult for childminders, who tend to work long hours as well as having their own parenting commitments. This makes distance-learning an attractive choice when deciding where to study. However, it also introduces additional challenges around isolation, due to limited face-to-face contact with fellow students or tutors.

A 'TYPICAL' CHILDMINDER STUDENT

The childminders undertaking The Open University FDEY are not a homogenous group but nevertheless some broad generalisations characterising a childminder taking this study route can be drawn out of my experience, and my discussions with other ALs. I have provided a detailed profile of the childminders taking part in this research within my discussion of the research design (Chapter 4). However, it

would seem useful to provide a picture of a 'typical' childminding student studying on the FDEY to set in context the discussion within this thesis. Although neither true of all childminders undertaking the FDEY, nor exclusive to childminders, the characteristics prevalent in childminding students relate to motivation, confidence levels, maturity and experience, and lifestyle and suggest they are not necessarily typical OU students.

Shirley is a 'typical' childminder studying the OU FDEY. She is 44 years old and has two teenage children. She works full-time as a registered childminder but, despite belonging to a Childminding Network, refers to herself as 'just a childminder'. There is no-one telling her that she needs to gain a degree-level qualification but she has chosen to undertake the FDEY so that she can develop her practice and also so that she can keep up with her daughter who has just started a childcare course at college! She is motivated to study but not confident, however, that she is academically capable of completing the FDEY and needs lots of reassurance from her tutor that she is doing ok.

She currently has six children on her books, ranging from 6 months to 9 years. She has been a child minder for twelve years, coming into it to give her son some company when her daughter went to school. During that time she has cared for children with a range of specific needs, such as delayed speech and behavioural problems, as well as those considered to have development needs within the norm.

She has attended a wide range of practice-based workshops relevant to her role and also gained an NVQ level three in Childcare Learning and Development but

has no experience of HE level study. She, therefore, has a wealth of practical experience but limited theoretical knowledge relating to practice or experience of academic writing.

She has made the decision to study with The Open University because of its flexibility in that there are no set hours or days to study, although her learning style is more suited to a face-to-face institution as she prefers listening to a tutor, and talking things over in real-time with people she can see. Distance-learning suits her lifestyle though, as she is juggling parenthood, work and study. However, her ICT skills are rudimentary and she needs to develop the study habits and skills to gain a degree by a distance-learning route. She works a ten hour day on average, so all her studying is done late at night or on her only non-working day - a Sunday.

Before providing an overview of the research questions and the rationale for particular foci, the next section shows how reflection is integral to the FDEY and outlines how childminders' reflective skills can be developed through study.

REFLECTION AND THE FDEY

Reflection is a key component of the FDEY both in respect of study materials and assessment. Attention is drawn to the focus on reflection from the outset with the module descriptions within the university prospectus mentioning reflection within the information given to students. Equally, the guides – which provide an orientation of each module for enrolled students - indicate the focus on reflection, taking a reflective approach to work and their development as a reflective practitioner.

The learning outcomes for the FDEY (Appendix 3) make specific reference to reflection with students told they are being assessed on their ability to 'reflect on their own values and those of others'; on 'how effectively they show evidence of reflective practice through written case studies, assignments and projects' and that they also must demonstrate their ability to 'reflect on the learning process, personal progress and personal experience and practice, identifying strengths and weaknesses and apply this reflection to practical issues'.

Reflection as a concept is outlined in the first weeks of study, with students introduced to Schön's (1983) 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action'. In the first two modules of the FDEY (Appendix 2), students are introduced to theoretical concepts underpinning practice. In the light of their developing knowledge of theory, students are directed to question what they do and how they might develop their practice by working through the activities set down in the study material. Reflection through these activities is intended to enable practitioners to interpret and personalise theoretical ideas and integrate it into tacit knowledge (Eraut, 1994:157). Case studies exemplifying reflection are provided throughout the module materials to support students to understand what it means to reflect on practice. Students are also expected to engage in reflection with others within their workplace (Appendix 4, Activity 1) or as part of online forum activities (Appendix 4, Activity 2). As can be seen in the data analysis chapter, these expectations can cause difficulties for childminders who do not work with others, or who do not feel confident in communicating with others on online forums, or lack the skills to do so effectively.

As students progress through the FDEY and undertake the Level 1 work-based learning module (E115), they are introduced to tools for reflection (Appendix 4). Through a structured, cyclical framework of reflection (the Reflective Practice Cycle) students are supported to reflect on their practice and question their values and beliefs and the impact of their practices in the light of their growing theoretical understanding of early years practice. Alongside this cyclical framework students are introduced to the idea that they have knowledge, values and beliefs that shape their practice but are hidden from view and difficult to articulate (the three-layer model of professional practice). It offers a visual representation of how reflection can support their professional development. The use of reflective frameworks aims to enable students to reflect at different levels, moving them away from 'everyday thinking' and 'incidental or limited reflection on practical experience' to 'systematic reflection with the aim of theoretical understandings and critical insights' (van Manen, 1977).

Students are also introduced to the idea of keeping a reflective learning journal in the first work-based learning module as a key component of developing as a reflective practitioner, and getting the most out of their studies by way of capturing their thoughts alongside noting down their responses to activities and their day-to-day practice. They are provided with a template to use (Appendix 4) on the module website, although they are not bound to set their learning journal out in any particular way. At various points in the study material they are prompted to record information in their learning journal, although the overall aim is for the reflective journal to be something they take ownership of themselves, and use as they see fit. The reflective journal is considered by the module team to be a valuable approach to helping improve the way in which students study and learn,

by enabling them to think about what they are studying and how they are studying. It also allows for reflection as deliberation on something that has happened as well as reflection as a form of metacognition (Eraut, 1994). By enabling reflection to become more obvious within a student's thinking about practice students the reflective learning journal promotes a more proactive, as opposed to reactive, stance when reflecting on practice.

Reflection on practice is assessed, with all assignments within the FDEY involving some element of reflection. Students on the FDEY must be working in an early years setting for the duration of the qualification and are expected to draw on personal practice when reflecting and apply theory to practice. They are prompted to compare and contrast their own practice with current ideas about working with children in early years settings and encouraged to reflect on and possibly to adapt and change, practice to better meet the needs of the children in their setting. By looking at the expectations at the start of the FDEY and the end, it can be seen that students are expected to move to a more critical stance within their reflections. As an example, the first assignment on the FDEY asks students to write an essay **reflecting on** what they have learnt in their first few weeks of study and **discuss** the various influences on their role and their setting. By the end of the FDEY the expectation is that they are able to write **a critical reflection and analysis** focused on their role and responsibilities and their professional journey.

Reflection is a key component of 'being a professional' (Appleby, 2010), and the FDEY is a professional qualification. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a heavy focus on reflection within the FDEY. As the reflection is also assessed it is

not unexpected that the childminders in this study see reflection as important and that they want to reflect with others. Whilst it is not surprising that the childminders engaged in reflective practice and, in many cases, successfully engaged in reflective practice, this thesis will explore how childminders can be successful, whom they reflect with, and the barriers and challenges to effective reflection and becoming a reflective practitioner.

RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

With the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008b) and the government agenda to professionalise the early years workforce there is considerable growth in research around reflection and the early years practitioner. Government documents and current publications relating to early years have provided key texts to inform a literature search. In recent years there has also been a rise in research dedicated to reflection in relation to 'semi- professions' . 'Semi-profession' is an ill-defined term (Eraut, 1994:1) but has been used here to encompass professions, such as nursing, social work and childcare, which have lower occupational status than professions seen as more powerful by society, such as law and medicine, but require a level of expertise that justifies the autonomy granted to a profession. Many practitioners within the semi-professions hold higher education qualifications, such as the Foundation Degree, that stops short of full degree.

Equally, distance-learning modules are becoming more common across higher education institutions, with a resulting rise in research looking at interaction between module participants, and considering how module design can facilitate reflection.

Research around becoming a reflective practitioner has increased dramatically over the past few years, largely due to the focus on reflection within professional qualifications. This emphasis is appearing within early years and, therefore, I have been able to access a growing pool of related research (Cable and Miller, 2008; Cooper, 2010).

My original intention for this doctoral study had been to carry out action research, focusing on childminders within my own tutorial groups, to develop my own practice as a tutor and to offer the childminders, themselves, some insight into the value of engaging in reflection with others, and to consider how childminders might go about finding others to reflect with. Through assignment feedback, and the management of online tutor group forums, a tutor can influence the extent to which a childminder can become a reflective practitioner and develop their levels of reflection, both to enable them to be successful in their studies by engaging in reflection on their practice and to become more reflective practitioners independent of their studies. By exploring how and why childminders reflected on their practice I hoped to be able to provide opportunities for effective reflection on practice through face-to-face and on-line tutorial activities and to encourage reflection outside of the module.

Although this has remained an aim, since beginning the study, my role has developed to include working on module production, and I began to see the wider potential of the study for childminders, other practitioners and professionals. There has been very little research into supporting lone workers in reflection on practice on distance-learning programmes and none specifically focusing on childminders. As such, I hope to raise awareness of the factors to consider when

developing strategies within printed text and on-line study material to facilitate childminders' reflection for professionals working on programmes of study involving reflection on practice. For childminders, this study provides some insight into some of the factors they may need to take into account when deciding whom to reflect with, and how to become a reflective practitioner. It will, therefore, be important to make this study accessible to a wide range of people. The dissemination of my research is discussed within Chapter 7.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As discussed within the rationale for my research there has been limited research into childminders and reflection on their practice and, therefore, the research questions are very broad, as befits an ethnographic, reflexive process 'where the data collection is relatively unstructured' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3) to allow for themes to emerge. The research questions remained essentially the same throughout the research process, although a fifth question was added after the initial analysis of the early interviews where professional identity (McGillivray, 2008) assumed particular importance.

The questions driving my data collection and analysis in the initial stages of my research were:

1. How do the childminders understand and interpret the term 'reflective practice' in the context of childminding?
2. How does the childminder's understanding of reflective practice and its uses change during their studies on the FDEY?
3. To what extent has participation in study increased reflective practice among the childminders?

4. What factors influence the childminders when deciding with whom to reflect?
5. How does the childminder's professional identity impact on their reflective practice?

The overall focus of questions 1, 2 and 3 is on the childminders' understanding of reflective practice and how this changes during their studies. The questions attempt to draw out any evidence of the impact of study on reflective practice and to identify within the data, the different kinds and levels of reflection childminders engaged in both before and during their studies.

The term 'reflective practice' does not have a rigid definition and, in addition, can be used loosely to refer to a range of practices that may or may not be considered to be reflection as defined within this thesis (see literature review chapter). The first question seeks to establish an understanding of how childminders perceive reflective practice in the context of their role by a direct question at the start of the interviews asking them to say what they understand by reflective practice, and to give an example illustrating reflection on practice.

Questions 2 and 3 focus on the identification of different kinds, and levels, of reflection (van Manen, 1977; Bain et al, 1999) and offer the opportunity to find out to what extent participation in study has increased reflective practice among the childminders taking part in the study and how their understanding of reflection and its use have changed. These two questions are borne out of my experience of tutoring over the years, which suggests that childminders' awareness of reflection, and how to engage in it, is heightened by study. As students progress from the

more theoretical input in E123 and E124 and through the work-based learning modules at Levels 1 and 2, my own experiences as a tutor suggest there is (generally) development in both verbal and written reflection on their practice. Question 3 seeks to explore how far study is the catalyst for the childminders in the study becoming a reflective practitioner.

Much of the current research on reflection stresses the importance of interaction with others for effective reflection on practice (Evans, 1999), particularly reflection with others within the workplace (Lave and Wenger, 1991). As many childminders work alone and, on a distance-learning module, are studying alone access to other childcarers is an issue, this led to the fourth research question around the factors influencing childminders when deciding who to reflect with. This question seeks to explore how far the factors influencing childminders resonate with the key factors identified in the literature around areas such as relationships, quality of reflection, mode of interaction and belonging to a community of practice.

At the beginning of the research I was focused on the process of reflection and how childminders reflect on their practice and with whom they reflect. However, early data analysis indicated that reflection acted as a transformational process on professional identity and that identity was an important factor driving reflective practices. The fifth research question sought to more explicitly explore the impact of professional identity on reflective practice.

By drawing on the childminder's own voice (Clark, Kj rholt and Moss, 2005) and understanding the particular needs of the solo practitioner the research questions

aim to identify workable solutions to engaging childminders in reflection for those involved in both the design and delivery of the FDEY modules.

Reflection on the pilot study carried out in Year 1 and the emergent themes identified through data analysis in the early stages of the research, suggested a difference in how childminders reflected on their practice and whom they reflected with, depending on the frequency of face-to-face access to other childcare professionals. A decision was, therefore, taken to refocus the main research.

By definition, childminders work in their own home, with the vast majority of childminders working alone. However, some childminders also work part-time in another childcare setting, work with an assistant in their own home, or meet up face-to-face on a daily or very frequent basis with other childcarers. Childminders in these situations do not have the same difficulties reflecting with others as childminders who are more isolated in terms of meeting with other professionals. I, therefore, felt it was important to minimise variables impacting on the opportunity to meet face-to-face with other childcare professionals, such as living in an urban environment where there is a greater likelihood that there could be frequent face-to-face contact with other childminders. Only childminders living and working in rural isolation were, therefore, selected for this study as they are less likely to be able to reflect face-to-face with others at the point of action. Rural isolation was taken to mean that childminders were living and working in a village or small town with no other childminders known to them.

The decision taken to focus on isolation also brought about the need to involve childminders who were not personally known by me, and who were not part of my

tutorial groups. These decisions are discussed further in the methodology chapter.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

Essential terminology within the thesis title has been defined within this section. In addition, a glossary has been provided at the beginning of this thesis containing key terms and acronyms, for the reader to refer back to, if necessary, throughout.

A distinction between themselves and other childcare practitioners was noted by the childminders during the interviews. Not all childminders work alone, as some work with one or two assistants (Ofsted, 2009). However, for ease of reference, due to the focus of this study on childminders working in isolation, a childminder has been defined as someone who works alone in their own home, caring for other people's children. The term 'childcarer' has been used to refer to someone who works with other people, in a setting outside their own home, such as a nursery or pre-school.

Reflective practice, as can be seen in the literature review chapter, can be defined in a number of different ways. To ensure that childminders taking part in my research were broadly viewing reflection in a similar way a basic definition, taken from the NCMA training programme, Extending Childminding Practice (a CACHE Level 3 post registration childminding course) was provided with the questionnaire (see Appendix 8). A more considered definition, however, has been provided in Chapter 2, to inform the analysis of the data in Chapter 5.

The Commonwealth of Learning Training Toolkit (Commonwealth of Learning, 1999) notes there is 'no one definition of open and distance-learning'. The key characteristics of:

- Separation of teacher and learner in time or place
- Institutional accreditation
- Use of mixed-media within course materials
- Two-way communication
- Possibility of face-to-face meetings for tutorials

are, however, present within The Open University FDEY.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The objectives for Chapter 2 are to set my study within current research on reflective practice within the workplace and identify gaps and to consider the key areas relating to my research questions. Chapter 3 explores the theoretical framework of the study and looks at how the research questions were investigated and the conceptual framework of my research. Leading on from the methodology in Chapter 3, which looks at *why* I made certain decisions, Chapter 4 will consider *how* I carried out the research, and any impact on the research questions. The ethical issues involved in the research and how they were addressed are also part of this chapter. Chapter 5 focuses on the knowledge that has been generated as a result of my analysis of the data and a consideration of how this compares with the literature. Chapter 6 considers the positive elements of the research along with the limitations due to methodology and research design decisions. The possibilities for further research will also be considered here. Chapter 7 considers what has been learnt from the research and goes on to discuss recommendations

at individual, strategic and support levels. A summary, and final conclusions, against the research questions will conclude the whole thesis.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the study, providing a rationale for my research and explaining why it is of particular relevance to me, in terms of my role and personal interest. The relevance to others, including childminders and other professionals, either working in childcare or involved in the field of education, has also been addressed. An overview of the research and the research questions has been given, along with the profile of the childminders participating in the study. The structure of the FDEY has been given to provide the context within which childminders are studying. Key concepts have been defined to provide clarity of terminology used within the thesis.

As has been discussed in this Chapter, and borne out by a recent National Children's Bureau research summary into childminding (Owen and Fauth, 2010), there has been little research into reflective practices in the context of childminding. In the following Chapter a critical analysis of literature relevant to the key areas relating to my research questions will be undertaken.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

The objectives for this chapter are to set my research within current literature on reflective practice within the workplace and identify gaps, and to consider the key areas relating to my research questions. The literature review will also consider the ways in which reflection on practice might be managed and facilitated to enable me to explore how the tutor might encourage reflection. This chapter also defines reflection, and establishes the appropriateness of my intended definition for use with the gathering of the research data, as well as considering the alternatives to reflection and whether reflection is a good thing. At the end of this chapter the research questions will be reviewed and a final set of questions will be presented that include one on professional identity.

The chapter begins with a rationale for the four main strands within my literature review:

Strand 1 Concept of reflection

Strand 2 Importance of others to the reflective process

Strand 3 Deciding whom to reflect with

Strand 4 Becoming a reflective practitioner

An explanation of how I carried out my literature review has been offered to indicate my thinking around the sources used, and the decisions taken during the process of identifying relevant literature.

Each strand has then been taken in turn to show how the literature has informed both the background to my research and the analysis of my findings. The rationale for each strand has been discussed in an initial paragraph at the beginning of the appropriate section.

RATIONALE FOR LITERATURE AND THE PROCESS OF REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

The flowchart in Figure 1 illustrates the process of how literature was sought and identified and how the themes and structure of the literature were generated.

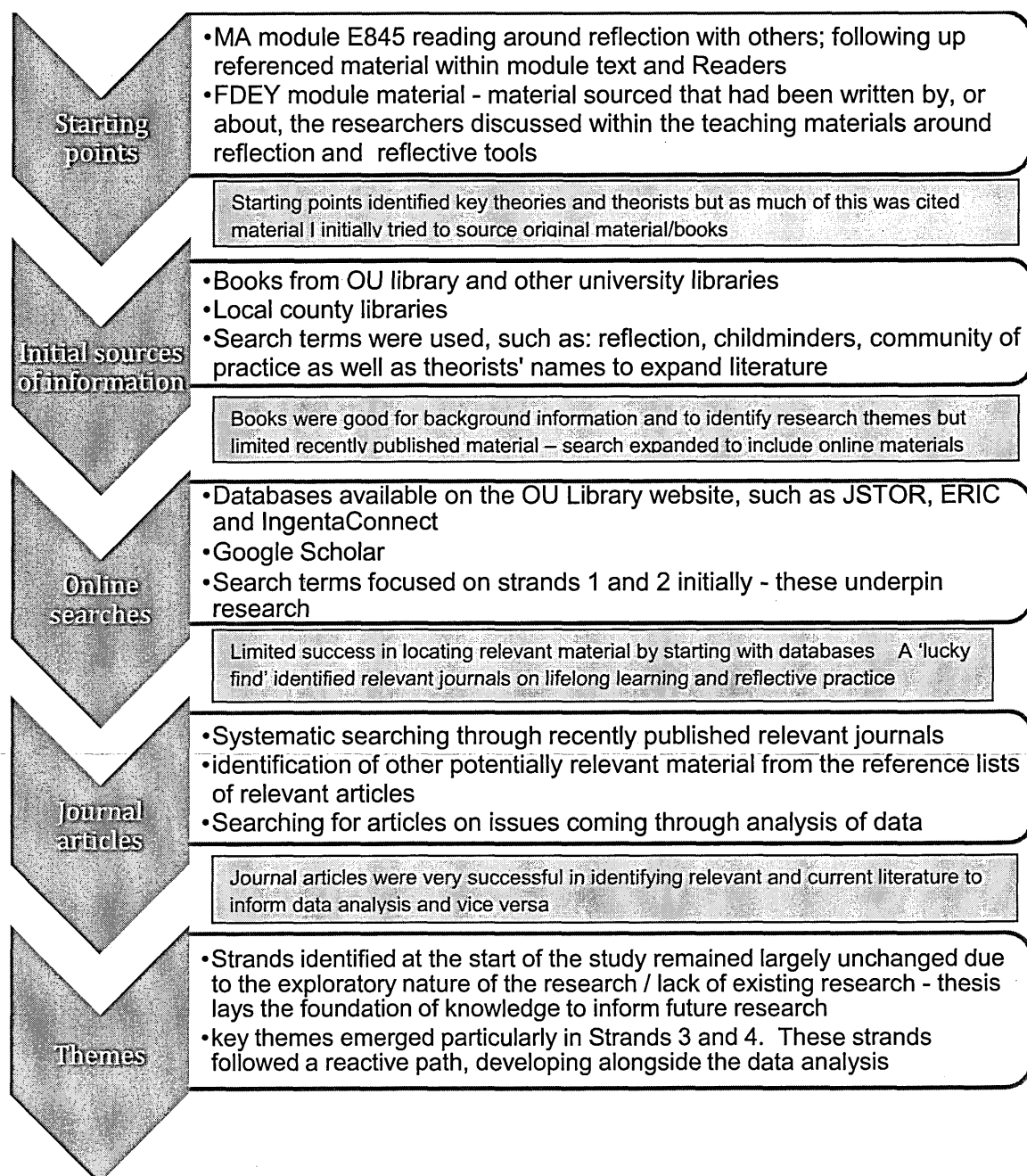
Figure 1 outlines not only the sources used, but also the factors impacting on the choice of material used and the location of that material.

As my knowledge of the literature expanded I was able to widen my search to broaden the themes within each strand. This knowledge of the literature came not only from my own reading, but also from the opportunities I was afforded by way of a move to a central academic role within The Open University part way through my Doctorate. This role gave me access to research meetings only open to internal members of staff, as well as 'knowledgeable others' (Vygotsky, 1978). I was prompted to investigate different sources of material, and identify new avenues to explore as a result of my own thinking around what I was learning from engagement with other researchers, in parallel with the data analysis.

There has been a growth in published literature in two areas pertinent to my thesis – early years and reflective practice, and social networking – in the last few years. This posed a potential problem in that the research, and the bulk of the literature review, were carried out before taking a break in my studies. To avoid the

literature review chapter growing to unmanageable proportions in the latter stages of the write-up of the thesis a decision was taken not to add to the literature review *unless* there were gaps to fill as data were analysed.

Figure 1 How literature was sought and identified



Initial starting points for researching literature stemmed from my reading undertaken for the MA module E845 *Supporting lifelong learning*. This reading allowed identification of relevant material relating to reflecting with others, including the issue of whether or not others needed to be involved in the reflective process. Another starting point stemmed from researchers, such as Schön and Kolb, identified within the FDEY module material discussing reflection on practice. I quickly found that the research focused on reflection *with* others. My attempts to find research around childminders drew a blank and I found that I had identified a gap in the research leading to a lack of knowledge around how childminders can be supported to reflect on their practice. This did, however, cause problems when it came to identifying appropriately targeted research involving childminders, and, therefore, much of my research has involved other client-centred practice, such as nursing where there is some similarity within some job roles and what is being reflected on within practice.

My pilot research in Year 1 demonstrated to me how essential it was that we had agreement over what reflection is. Equally, when analyzing the research data I found there were differences in what constituted reflection. This led me to research a definition and my thinking developed from thinking of reflection as having one definition with the finding of Van Manen's (1977, cited in Rosenstein, 2002) and Bain et al's (1999) definitions of reflection having several levels.

I found that researching literature alongside carrying out my research and data analysis meant that each informed the other and I was both proactive, and reactive in searching out relevant research, particularly in relation to the importance of

others to the reflective process and the factors impacting on whom childminders decide to reflect with.

Initially my literature search focused on finding relevant printed material using the library database. However, I found that this was relatively unproductive, primarily for reasons of currency and context for reflection. As my skills in using e-resources developed, journals and on-line databases have successfully enabled me to broaden out my search to include material from cultures such as Australia where distance-learning is more established and to access current material around the early years and reflection, in particular.

STRAND 1 CONCEPT OF REFLECTION

THE CONCEPT OF REFLECTION

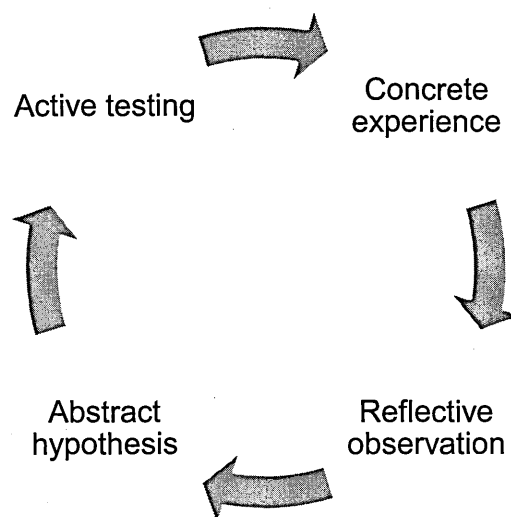
The concept of reflection is more complicated than at first appears and, as such it was important to establish a definition of reflective practice to be used when conducting the research with childminders. The participants in the research needed to be clear what is being discussed, and the reader needs to understand how the term has been interpreted. An understanding of the different kinds, and levels, of reflection was also important at the analysis stage.

Dewey's (1997:6) definition of reflective thought as involving 'active, persistent, and careful consideration' of beliefs and the evaluation of any evidence to support these beliefs, is evident in the reflective practice cycle used within the FDEY

module materials (see Appendix 4) to help students to systematically identify what they think about a particular area of their practice.

Kolb's experiential learning cycle (see Figure 2) considers 'immediate or concrete experiences to be the basis for observations and reflections'. As this same expectation is a key aspect of the FDEY modules this seems a logical place to start in attempting a definition on which to base discussion.

Figure 2 Kolb's experiential learning cycle (Adapted from Kolb and Kolb, 2005:195)



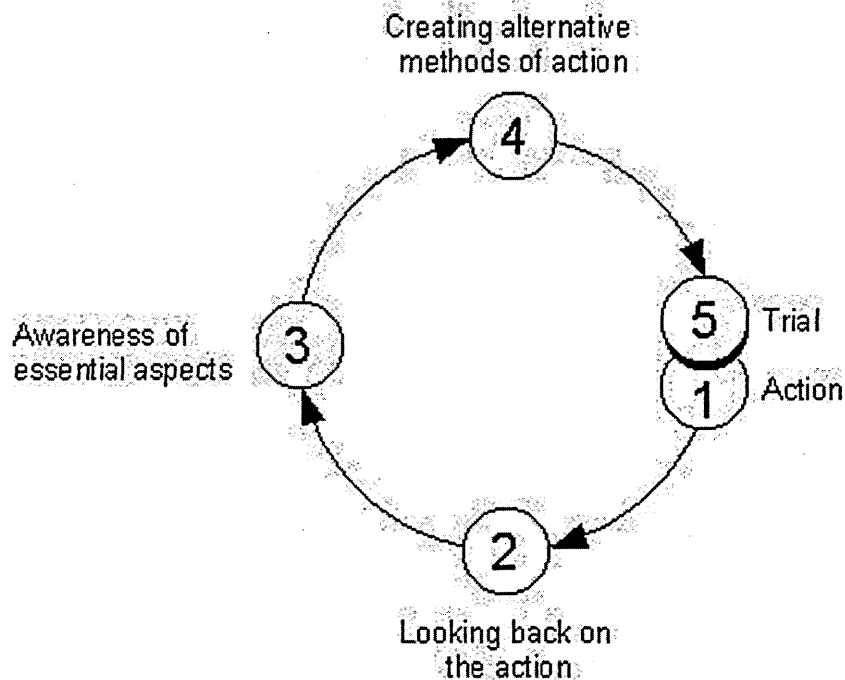
cf Kurt Lewin

White's (2002) definition relates to all Kolb's stages of the learning cycle (plan, do, observe and reflect), defining reflection as:

- Thinking carefully about the way you work (*plan*)
- Thinking about what you do and why you do it (*do, observe*)
- Thinking about what you would do differently in the future (*reflect*)

In determining the purpose of reflection, by basing the reflection on own practice (use of 'you'), White's definition fits with the 'personalist' or 'narrative' approach identified by Sparks-Langer (1992) where reflection is geared to constructing personal practice-based knowledge and developing awareness of one's own identity, beliefs and development. Equally, in placing an emphasis on 'thinking', it matches Evans' (1999:57) definition of reflection as 'a deliberate attempt to broaden understanding [...] and develop professional practice by devoting some time and attention to the process'.

As with Kolb (1984), White's (2002) definition does not specifically include theoretical knowledge and understanding. Korthagen (2001), in considering reflection in relation to teachers' professional learning, has developed the ALACT spiral model of reflection (see Figure 3), as a framework to enable students to learn to reflect and become self-directed learners.

Figure 3 Korthagen's ALACT spiral model

The ALACT model consists of five phases 1) Action 2) Looking back on the action 3) Awareness of the essential aspects 4) Creating alternative methods of action 5) Trial. It is a spiral model starting and ending to an action, and basically the first and the fifth phase are same.

Whilst acknowledging experience, his model focuses on the need for learners to understand themselves as teachers, rather than merely knowing a lot about teaching. As such, his model adds an extra stage – an awareness of essential aspects of the action - to Kolb's (1984) reflective cycle. However, neither Kolb (1984) nor Korthagen's (2001) models address levels of reflection.

Rather than one definition, Rosenstein (2002) notes there are many different kinds of reflection and asks how students can 'train themselves to recognise and change the levels of their own reflection'. This is outside the scope of White's (2003)

definition but was drawn out within the interviews (see chapter 5). van Manen (1977) defines four levels of reflection:

1. everyday thinking;
2. incidental and limited reflection on our practical experience;
3. systematic reflection with the aim of theoretical understandings and critical insights; and
4. reflection on reflection that examines how knowledge functions and how knowledge can be applied to active understanding.

Levels 1 and 2 are implicit within White's (2002) definition, and Schön's (1983) reflection-in-action, in that they relate directly to practice. Levels 3 and 4, involving structured reflection with an emphasis on theoretical knowledge, are less evident within White's (2002) definition, which does not specifically mention using theory within reflection, although maybe 'thinking carefully' implies some structure.

Whilst van Manen's (1977) levels do not necessarily involve noting down reflections, Bain et al. (1999), focus on written reflection, identifying different levels of reflection from their study of the reflective journals of 35 Australian student teachers, studying on a 1 year graduate Diploma of Education:

- Level 1, reporting the event as it occurred;
- Level 2, responding to the event in a spontaneous and emotional manner;
- Level 3, relating to the event in terms of past experience and knowledge;
- Level 4, reasoning about the event in terms of alternatives, examining assumptions, and conceptualizing characteristics of the occurrence; and
- Level 5, reconstructing the event in terms of theories that can be applied to a broader range of experiences.

These two definitions will be useful in analyzing the data emerging from my research, and when considering how to develop childminders' reflective skills and what it means to be a reflective practitioner.

Whilst White's (2002) definition does not, specifically, address issues such as levels of reflection (van Manen, 1977; Bain et al, 1999) or how reflection might take place (Rosenstein, 2002), and is therefore limited, it seems to cover the essential points of the process of reflection with a focus on practical experience. It has the added advantage of being familiar and easy to understand and is, therefore, a useful definition for use as a basis for discussion with childminders (see Appendix 8), but insufficiently detailed for the data analysis.

IS REFLECTION A GOOD THING?

In thinking about whether reflection is always a good thing, Claxton (2003) offers the argument that constantly stopping to reflect on practice 'can interfere with the skilled performance that stems from underlying expertise'. Instead, Claxton (2003) puts forward intuition as a 'different way of knowing' – knowledge in use, as opposed to a more articulated response. This concept has concordance with Schön's (1987) 'knowledge-in-action' or Eraut's (1994) 'skilled behaviour' where the practitioner responds to a situation without deliberating based on their knowledge and experience. In contrast it seems that Claxton assumes reflection results in a halt in practice. Claxton offers no discussion on whether reflection has a place outside the immediacy of daily practice. Miller et al (2005:69) however, argue that 'we have to move from intuitive knowledge to a conscious awareness of why we do what we do', and that practitioners need to become more conscious of

underlying expertise. Osgood (2006), too, in looking at the construction of professionalism discusses how opportunities for critical reflection enable practitioners to challenge policy directives and raise awareness of their own agency.

Whilst there are critiques of Schön and his conceptualization of reflection and the reflective practitioner (Newman, 1999; Procee, 2006) the empowering impact of reflection on actual practice (Osterman and Kottkamp, 1993) is largely unquestioned by contemporary research, making it difficult to argue reflection is not a good thing. It could, however, be argued that childminders may be discouraged from critically reflecting on their practice (Sparks-Langer, 1992; Grimmer, 1988, cited in Désirée et al, 2007) where it causes conflict, for example, between their values and beliefs and the scope/limitations of their practice. However, becoming critically conscious of their provision is not something negative, but rather is conscientization (*conscientização*), as defined by Freire (1993), and can be an agent for change and empowerment; once practitioners become aware of any inadequacies in practice, they are morally bound to instigate change to provide a better service to the families with whom they work.

In a competitive market, providing good quality childcare, and being able to 'sell' their service, is in a childminder's best interests. It is, therefore, important that childminders are up-to-date and are aware of 'best practice', and can strive to provide it. Childminder perspective on the value of reflection in this process, in the light of a current expectation of reflection, could provide useful material to consider the question of whether or not reflection is a good thing. Equally, exploring why childminders reflect on their practice is likely to impact on those with whom they

reflect. If they are happy to maintain the status quo, for example, they are less likely to seek out someone who will challenge their thinking.

The next strand considered in this literature review focuses on how important others are to the reflective process.

STRAND 2 IMPORTANCE OF OTHERS TO THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS

REFLECTION AS A SOLO PROCESS

Developing a student's skills of self-reflection is an objective in many practice-based modules (Onyx (2001:135) and all students on The Open University FDEY are encouraged to keep a reflective diary as part of their studies. This is primarily a solo activity and, apart from providing examples from practice for assignments, is unlikely to be shared with others. Mackintosh (1998) in questioning the value of reflection for nurses, focuses on similar tools for self-reflection. She discusses how critical incidents, most often relating to clinical practice, are recorded in a personal reflective journal, to be referred to later. Mackintosh (1998) sees barriers to engaging in meaningful reflection through these methods, including only having the one perspective and memory issues in how well events are recalled. She concludes there is no evidence the use of reflection equips nurses to be more competent practitioners, although it is not clear if this is seen to be due to the mode, or timing of reflection, or the lack of interaction with others.

There have also been studies looking at work-based learning modules within the Australian university system (Onyx, 2001; King, 2000) that seem to suggest that reflection can be undertaken without interaction with others. Where these

modules are face-to-face, the student will have contact with an academic tutor as well as a work-place supervisor. Although the contact provides opportunities, unlike Evans (1999) who sees the study advisor role as an important one for encouraging and supporting students to reflect on practice, Onyx (2001) does not specifically mention reflection with these others.

In contrast to Onyx (2001), King (2000:126) in discussing the challenges involved in moving towards flexible learning practices (including on-line options) within higher education, specifically discusses how 'staff [need] to adopt teaching strategies that afford students opportunities to reflect on their personal development'. By omission, King's (2000) scanty discussion on 'UniSAnet' (an on-line programme within the University of South Australia) does not place importance on relationships or interaction with other students in learning; issues that others see as key. Equally, no value appears to be attached to face-to-face tuition and, although King (2000) sees a role for the tutor, this seems to be in creating opportunities for reflection, as opposed to direct involvement in the process.

Imel (1992) talks about different sources of support for developing the 'habit of reflective practice', citing a process of reflection called DATA (Peters, 1991), involving four steps (**D**escribe, **A**nalyse, **T**heorise and **A**ct). The first step is to describe the desired change, the context and the reasons for the change. In the second step, values and beliefs, and underlying theory behind the practice are identified. In step three, possibilities for change are explored and linked to theory. Finally the new practice is put into place and reflected upon. The description of these steps makes no mention of involving others in reflection. The impression

given is that, if the process is undertaken methodically, a practitioner can successfully reflect alone on a critical incident, task or problem within practice.

There are other issues to take into consideration in thinking about whether or not solo reflection on practice can be effective. Yeigh (2008) in focusing on six quality teaching inquiry projects involving a combination of twelve primary and secondary schools in Australia questions the level of critical engagement achievable in writing a reflective journal. Boud and Walker (1998) equally hold the view that 'without some direction [...] reflection [...] can become self-referential, inward looking and uncritical', although my tutoring experiences would show there are, equally, examples of students who are overly critical of their practice. Evans (1999), too, notes that solo reflection can be undemanding and allows for potential avoidance of challenge. My own tutorial discussions, where students admit to missing out, or superficially completing, activities demanding reflection would seem to bear this out.

A conclusion could be drawn from this discussion that reflection does not need the involvement of others, but that others help with the quality and effectiveness, or balance, of the reflection.

INVOLVEMENT OF OTHERS IN THE REFLECTIVE PROCESS

Much of the research around reflection on practice assumes interaction with others (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Evans, 1999) particularly interaction with others within the workplace (Boud and Garrick, 1999) or as a component of training modules (Rosenstein, 2002).

Childminders on a distance-learning module do not have easy recourse to others to reflect with face-to-face, particularly others within their 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998). A 'community of practice' has been defined within this study as one in which people learn and collaborate together over time to discuss and debate and develop new understandings and establish shared practices. If engagement with others is deemed essential to the reflective process, the question of whether reflection *can* take place through solitary activity without interaction with others or whether ways need to be found to engage with others, is a key issue to explore within my study. Alongside this, with the growth in on-line conferencing and e-communication, discussed within Strand 3 'Deciding with whom to reflect', a range of options for engagement with others become available. However, these new options raise new issues around whether:

- it is important to have face-to-face contact and whether you need to build up a relationship with someone before you can reflect with them
- there are differences between on-line and face-to-face relationships and whether this impacts on how and what childminders reflect on

Schön's (1983) model of 'reflection-in-action' involves thinking critically about practice and making immediate changes to practice as a result of reflecting on practice at the point of action. For childminders this involves reflecting on aspects of practice, such as why an activity is not going well, or how to manage a child's behavior, usually (although not exclusively) without recourse to others. On the other hand, 'reflection-on-action' (Schön, 1983) such as Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle discussed at the beginning of this chapter, is a more deliberative form of reflection removed from the point of the 'action'. For childminders, working alone, only the latter offers the opportunity for reflection with others and so, establishing whether effective reflection can take place outside the immediacy of day-to-day practice (Evans, 1999; Desirée et al, 2007) is important to my research as this poses questions for the timing of reflection and, therefore, the players, and their role, in the reflective process.

I would argue that whilst there are tools for reflection that can be used without input from others, such as reflective journal writing, which is an essentially private activity (Bolton, 2010:125), it is the involvement of others that makes for more effective reflection. Bain et al's (1999) research involving thirty-five student teachers investigated the use of reflective journals to facilitate learning. They concluded that whilst there are significant benefits from journal writing even without input from others, constructive supervisor feedback that challenged thinking encouraged growth in reflective writing. The research also raised the issue that an individual's perceptions of the trustworthiness of the tutor also impacted on whether they took feedback on board. Bain et al's (1999) focus on the interaction between tutor and student, rather than between the students themselves implies that improvement in reflection requires input from a more

knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) Having moderated the student forums for E115 (a Level 1 module) and the final module in the FDEY, E215 (a Level 2 module), my experience is that growth in reflective writing can come as a result of interacting with other childcare professionals who are also studying, suggesting that Bain et al's (1999) implied hierarchy is not essential to increased level of reflection.

Potentially the level of reflection required or engaged in (van Manen, 1977) may impact on whether others need to be involved. Evans (1999:58) strongly suggests that 'one-to-one discussion and small group learning with student peers and teachers can greatly extend students' [reflective learning]'. Licklider's review of adult learning theory, as cited by Ferrarro (2001), similarly suggests that, while self-learning through experience in the workplace is important, interaction with others through large-group sessions and peer coaching are necessary to allow students to continuously examine assumptions and practices.

If we accept that solo reflection has the potential to be uncritical because it is easy to avoid challenging oneself, Barnett's (1999:31) discussion around supercomplexity, encompassing double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1978, cited in Marsick and Watkins, 2002:39), is very relevant to whether or not others need to be involved in the reflective process. This is not to say that reflection with others may not, equally, be uncritical, for a number of reasons, depending on whom the reflection is with, and in what context it takes place. However Barnett (1999:29) notes how we need to keep learning and challenging our basic concepts if we work under conditions of supercomplexity, where beliefs, values and understanding underpinning practice (a key feature of the Open University

modules, E115 and E215 and the fast moving pace of current early years practice) are challenged.

Kettle and Sellar's research findings, cited by Ferrarro (2001:3), with third-year teaching students, supports the idea that reflection with others is necessary for the transformation of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Their findings established that collaboration with peers through engagement with groups set up for reflective activities encouraged students to challenge existing theories and their own views. Similarly, Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) cite Berkey et al's findings (1990:216) from the Teacher Development and Organisational Change Project (TDOC), noting that exposure to other viewpoints is necessary to trigger new ideas and effect change.

It seems then, from the research that, where there are challenges to practice and the introduction of new ideas or theory, interaction with others, particularly peers, aids effective reflection

STRAND 3 DECIDING WITH WHOM TO REFLECT

There is a variety of literature offering an insight into the potential influences on childminders when deciding with whom to reflect. In order to contain the breadth of this discussion, there has been a particular focus on whether face-to-face interaction is important as this is an area particularly pertinent to distance-learning study. This strand followed a more reactive path, developing alongside the

analysis of the data as key themes emerged, rather than informing the research questions,

Eraut (2008), in a draft working paper looking at how professionals learn through work, identifies how tacit knowledge of others provides the basis for interactions with others. This tacit knowledge in face to face situations is based on the impressions we form of character and behaviour through observing within certain contexts. Eraut (2008) sees this knowledge as being 'both biased and self-confirming', as it is based on the complexities of human interactions, which involve prejudice and interpretation

Research around reflection on practice, both as a component of training modules and within the workplace, identifies the importance of reflecting with others, and the quality, or effectiveness, of this interaction. Knights (1985) draws on her experiences as a counsellor to suggest the importance of reflecting with a good listener, arguing that 'reflection is most profound when it is done aloud, with the aware attention of another person'. She does, however, acknowledge that gaining the listener's total attention can be difficult during conversation as others are also vying to put their own ideas across. Whilst Knights (1985) seems to be suggesting value in an unequal relationship between listener and reflectee, Kolb and Kolb's (2005:208) view that 'significant learning can occur through conversation' suggests that a two-way exchange can provide opportunities for reflection on experiences. They do however, agree that the domination of 'conversational space' (Ibid) by a range of opposing dimensions, such as talking without listening can impact negatively on learning. Whether students consciously choose to reflect with a 'good listener' is not addressed.

The key issues (identified above) to consider when thinking about whom childminders choose to reflect with: relationships, quality of reflection, opinion of others and mode of interaction, were kept in mind when identifying literature within the following themes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital is a sociological term with differing notions of its meaning put forward by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putman, among others. Within these notions there are also different types of social capitals, such as 'bonding social capital', which considers access to social support networks where engagement is with similar people, and 'bridging social capital' which considers social diversity and engagement with a wider range of people enabling the 'crossing of boundaries' (Wenger, 2010) For the purposes of my research, social capital has been defined as the networks and relationships a childminder builds up and the relationships of trust and reciprocity they develop (Stevens et al, 2007) in order to reflect effectively on practice.

In looking at young people in secondary schools, research carried out by Stevens et al (2007) for the DfES, considered how the development of social capital is related to self-esteem and a student's self-concept of their ability. The conclusions drawn indicated that the school had an important role to play in supporting students to develop their social capital. This links in with later discussion within this chapter around the tutor's role in supporting students to develop their professional identity and the impact of a childminder's view of themselves on with whom they build a relationship. Boud and Walker (1998) see trust and security as vital for individuals to be able to engage with others, but place

the responsibility on the tutor 'to create a climate [of safety] in which the expression of feelings is accepted and legitimate' rather than seeing trust as a personal issue.

Evans (1999:70) suggests 'reflecting with other people can bring important extra dimensions to the process [of reflection].' He skates over the issue of social capital, but cites research by Burgess et al (1992); *Black Consultancy in Practice Teaching* (1994); Hanmer and Statham (1988) suggesting that it may be important to reflect with someone of similar cultural background (Evans, 1999:72).

BELONGING TO A 'COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE'

A 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998:5) has been defined within this study as a community in which people learn and collaborate together over time to discuss and debate and develop new understandings and establish shared practices. There are three essential characteristics that combine to define a 'community of practice': 'the domain', 'the community' and 'the practice' (Wenger, 2006). A 'community of practice' has a distinctive identity or domain, defined by a shared interest or concern for something practitioners do together, and there is a commitment to share ideas and learn from others' knowledge, skills and expertise. The community results from members engaging in joint activities, helping each other and sharing information. Members build relationships that enable them to learn together through participation and belonging that relies on active dialogue, whether by meeting face-to-face or through virtual interaction and collaboration. Members of a community of practice must be practitioners who develop together a

shared repertoire of experiences, stories and tools to progress practice, tackle issues or solve problems.

Belonging to a 'community of practice' has been identified as useful to the process of reflective practice for early years practitioners, providing them with the opportunity to 'develop some shared sense of meaning, ownership and even control over what is valued and recognized as 'appropriate practice' (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2008b:173). However, in my experience, some practitioners find it easier than others to feel they belong to a community of practice and that they are an equal player within it. In part, this may be bound up with social capital and an individual's ability to interact with a diverse range of people and their own feelings of self-worth in terms of what they can contribute to the community.

Whilst Field, (2005) in looking at social capital and adult learning and Boud and Walker (1998) with their focus on professional education, concentrate on the importance of trust in the relationship, Wenger (1998:174) focuses on a sense of belonging, identifying 'three modes of belonging'. Wenger (1998) sees it as important to belong to a 'community of practice', considering participation in these as essential to learning. Wenger (2000:230) also focuses on mutuality (the depth of social capital) within the community of practice, emphasising personal trust and trust in terms of working together and being supportive of each other.

Kidd (1998:137) offers implied support for the importance of a community of practice through his discussion of the Japanese Nonaka 'knowledge spiral' model which stresses the importance of 'comradeliness' and 'informal networking'. With childcare on the political agenda, the political implications of togetherness in the

term 'camradeliness' may be a relevant factor in relation to whom childminders reflect with within their 'community of practice'.

Keep and Rainbird's (2000:184) discussion on 'harness[ing] existing pools of expertise and knowledge' supports the role of a community of practice and social interaction within reflective learning (Wenger, 2000:229), although they do not focus on what needs to be in place for knowledge-sharing to take place. Hamilton (2000:6), on the other hand, sees 'learning [...] in terms of initiation into a community of practice involving apprentice-like relationships'.

The above issues are important on a distance-learning module. How can childminders be initiated into the community of practice relating to childcare? Are there issues relating to whether they feel they can belong and whether they feel equal? Whilst recognising the importance of belonging to a community of practice, there seems to be a gap in research relating to how this can be achieved, particularly where there may be only 'virtual' interaction.

VIRTUAL INTERACTION

E-communication is becoming an increasingly important part of distance-learning modules aimed at overcoming student isolation. This is particularly true of The Open University Foundation Degree in Early Years (FDEY) where there is an increasing emphasis on the use of, for example, on-line forum discussion to facilitate reflection on a range of topics, as students move through the programme.

However, interaction does not just happen. An important factor to consider is the building up of a relationship between individuals to enable them to feel comfortable with each other and confident to participate in a discussion. With the growth in virtual accessibility to others, there is a wide range of research focusing on e-learning and how reflection with others can be facilitated. Although the research identified here focuses on the relationship between the tutor and student, rather than between the students themselves, there is recognition that the relationship between participants engaging in on-line discussion is important. Smith's (2004, p281) research relating to the development of a Virtual Campus, considers how academic staff can be convinced of the advantages of using an on-line learning environment (VLE). In looking at the dynamic of the teacher/student relationship, she notes that a benefit of online discussion is that students feel 'less intimidated and more free to participate'. Although the reasons for this are not identified, it could be argued that this is due to the skill of the facilitator/tutor and the use of effective tools that enable the breakdown of barriers.

The use of synchronous on-line tools as a way of engaging in informal chat, for example, can make it easier for participants to 'see each other as individuals' (MacDonald, 2008, p96), MacDonald (2008) and Smith (2004) suggest that, not only is it possible to build a relationship with others online, but that it may, actually, be easier to build a relationship with a diverse range of people. It is, perhaps, easier to be equal within an online discussion, where context cues are often missing, and the roles of self and others can be less obvious. This would certainly open up avenues for childminders to overcome their feelings of inferiority within the 'landscape of childcare practice' (Wenger, 2010), enabling them to reflect with others on an equal footing.

There are, however, disadvantages to on-line discussion that can impact on the building of relationships. Rourke et al (1999) considers how the absence of 'social context cues' can lead to misunderstandings. This can make it difficult to build up a relationship as there are none of the visual or verbal clues to pick up on and it is easy to upset others. The effectiveness of on-line communication can be influenced by the observance of Practical Communication Principles (PCPs) (Zimmer and Alexander, 2000, cited in Hatzipanagos, 2006). PCPs offer a framework (netiquette) for students to ensure they communicate effectively and tutors have a role to 'set the appropriate rules of interaction [as these] can contribute greatly to student attainment and quality of communication' Hatzipanagos (2006).

The on-line interaction discussed here relates to module-based activities, where the tutor is involved in setting up, or facilitating, the reflective opportunities. As such, the tutor (or, perhaps, a forum moderator) has a responsibility to control the environment and manage the conditions to promote high quality discussion. As identified in Chapter 1, childminders studying on the FDEY are expected to engage in on-line module activities requiring reflection, but there is scope to investigate how less formal e-learning environments (such as Yahoo forums), or tools (such as text-messaging), are used and how childminders form relationships where there is no mechanism in place to facilitate the building of relationships.

Notwithstanding the identified disadvantages with online interaction, e-communication offers opportunities to overcome some of the potential barriers for childminders in reflecting with others. McKenzie (2010) in the context of student nurse education, also noted how different learning activities allowed students to

role play within a safe environment and take on virtual identities. Whilst McKenzie (2010) focuses on the development from student to professional nurse, there is the potential for the e-environment to provide childminders with the opportunity to take on a different identity and more equal identity with other childcarers. Belonging to a community of practice, virtual or otherwise, has the capacity to impact on professional identity (Paige-Smith and Craft, 2008b:170); an area that is currently to the fore in documentation with the advent of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DCSF, 2008b), and a focus for contemporary early years research (Moss, 2006; Cable and Goodliff, 2007), with the increasing professionalization of the early years workforce.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Whether or not childminders, and other childcarers see themselves as professional, and whether others both within, and outside, the childcare sector regard them as such, impacts on the professional identity of childminders. This section of the literature review will debate what it means to be a professional in the context of early years, and examine what constitutes professional identity before looking at how childminders demonstrate their identity as childminders.

Traditionally a 'profession' has been associated with a high level of education, high status, and corresponding [financial] rewards, such as in law or accountancy (Nurse, 2007). The traditional model of a profession includes a hierarchical role structure (Nurse, 2007:4), with 'strata of power' (Felstiner, 2005) and a qualifications ladder which assumes gaining a specific body of knowledge before beginning practice, or, at least alongside practice (Nurse, 2007:3), as with nursing. Eraut (1994) also sees continual upskilling as a key factor in being a professional.

Belonging to a traditional profession (Eraut, 1994) involves working within certain boundaries and adhering to pre-determined guidelines, set by a professional body (Nurse, 2007:3). All professions have their own specialised language and childcare is no exception to this. Being able to use and understand this language allows a person to become accepted within the profession and gain a sense of belonging, and being recognised as belonging, to the profession. This is an important aspect of professional identity (Cable and Miller, 2008, p173).

Behaviour, too, is an important factor in being a professional. In developing a method of measuring students' fitness to practice medicine, McLachlan (2009) considered professional behaviour difficult to define. Although his 'Conscientiousness Index' focused on student behaviour and its indicator for professional behaviour after qualifying, it draws attention to attributes of a professional. Griffin (2008:66) considers that attitudes and behaviour such as being business-like and professional skills contribute to professionalism. Eraut (1995), too, considers the 'ideology of professionalism', seeing this as encompassing the values of trustworthiness, integrity, autonomy and reliable standards.

The above criteria defining a professional do not completely fit in with the requirements to be a childcarer. Childcare is, in the main low paid and is seen as low status (Martin, 2001). Equally, whilst childcare has a integrated qualifications framework (CWDC, 2009) which allows for progression and continual professional development, the reversal of the standard relationship between theory and practice, set out above, enables the childcare profession to operate to a more egalitarian structure where all childcarers are termed as equal, than is, perhaps,

possible within this traditional view. Regardless of setting (large day nursery, village pre-school or home-based setting) there is no differential status inferred within the childcare sector, although societal values and beliefs provide a perception of a hierarchy in the status given to different forms of childcare.

However, many of the criteria *are* met within the childcare sector. The introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008b), and similar early years curricula, fit with the growing professionalization of childcare in that it 'gives people working in all types of childcare a set of standards to adhere to' (DCSF, 2008d). There is an expectation on education and training, with a commitment from the current government to a 'highly motivated, professional and multi-disciplinary workforce, led by graduates' (DCSF, 2007).

Professional Development (CPD) programmes provide teachers and practitioners with access to tools to enhance and broaden their professional knowledge, skills and expertise (DCSF, 2008c) and engage in continual upskilling.

A professional identity comes from a sense of belonging, and being recognised as belonging, to a profession (Cable and Miller, 2008:173) by using the external factors defining a professional, such as qualifications, level of training, their knowledge and expertise, to determine how well they fit into the profession or community of practice. Miller (2008:261) in discussing the reform of the children's workforce, and the development of new professional roles, notes that professional identity is, in part, determined by the individual's view of how effectively or competently they are meeting the Standards set.

Professional identity is complex and tied up with self esteem and the views of those both working within the childcare sector, and those outside (Griffin, 2008:65). For childminders there are some key issues around perceived status

and role in determining their own professional identity. While much of the current research focuses on qualities and professional competence, childminders, within my study at least, seem to define themselves in terms of the theoretical knowledge and understanding they do not have, rather than focusing on the attributes they do. As will become evident within the data analysis chapter, childminders see themselves as a distinct group within the childcare community of practice and are acutely aware of their perceived lower status. A recent report on research into childminding (Owen and Fauth, 2010) shows that much of the research into childminding is either historical, or carried out within a different cultural setting. There is, therefore, a gap in knowledge and understanding of childminders in relation to professional identity to be addressed within this study.

STRAND 4 BECOMING A REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

It is not enough to consider the players in reflection and with whom childminders can reflect, without considering how childminders can become reflective practitioners.

THE PROCESS OF BECOMING REFLECTIVE

At a government and policy level, reflection is seen as a required tool to becoming an effective practitioner. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a wealth of research around the different ways reflection can be facilitated through face-to-face training s (Korthagen, 2001; Boud and Walker, 1998). Research relating to teaching reflection on a distance-learning programme, alongside an understanding of 'why' and 'how' particular strategies can work, is much less evident.

Much of the research identified in this chapter seems to suggest that reflection without some kind of framework is ineffective. Boud and Walker (1998:np) identify 'a tension between guidance that leads to the problems of recipe-following and a lack of structure that can lead to a loss of focus'. They see 'the presentation of appropriate reflective activities' (ibid) as crucial and focus on the skill of the tutor in this process. This presents challenges for distance-learning material where structure can become a straitjacket, ritualising the acts of reflection. On-line conferencing can go some way to address the issue of responsiveness to context and making the reflection relevant to an individual's practice.

Korthagen (2001) advocates a five-step procedure to promote reflection and link theory and practice, supporting Vygotsky's (1978) idea of the importance of a 'more knowledgeable other' to guide learning, in Korthagen's (2001) case, a tutor. Finding a way to illustrate or model reflective practice is, in my experience, an important issue. An interesting strategy, outlined by Rosenstein (2002), identifies how a tutor can help students to understand Schön's (1987) concept of reflection, and hence become reflective practitioners, by using a medium that can be identified with. This has been achieved by showing examples of levels of reflection both in- and on-action within Disney's 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice'. Students were asked to write a reflective journal in the role of Mickey Mouse and, thereby, gain an insight into their own reflective ability (Table 1).

Table 1 Example of reflective journal entry

Event/Action	Reflection-in-action (R <i>in</i> A)	Reflection-on-Action (R <i>on</i> A)	Discussion of levels (L) (Bain <i>et al</i> , 1999)
The broom doesn't stop bringing water and Mickey can stop it from doing so.	I'll try stopping it with violence – by chopping it with an axe.	Using violence made the problem worse. It might be that violent solutions don't lead to desirable results.	R <i>in</i> A demonstrates L3 – relating to the event via past experience and knowledge R <i>on</i> A demonstrates L4 – conceptualisation and drawing conclusions.

Source: *Rosenstein (2002:260)*

Whilst this may be a strategy for supporting childminders in becoming reflective, Bolton (2005) makes the point that 'we only learn effectively when doing what we want to do'. If there is truth in this statement, (and there is anecdotal evidence to support this idea) this suggests, to me, that there will be different solutions for different people, rather than a 'one size fits all' conclusion as the best method for helping students to become reflective practitioners.

These issues present challenges for a tutor whose only contact with childminder may be through assignments. How childminders on a distance-learning module can be supported through this process is largely unaddressed through the literature and is an area to explore through my research.

Reflection on practice is not only considered an essential part of current early years training modules, but there is an assumption that everyone can become reflective with the right input and/or people to reflect with. The literature explores a number of factors impacting on ability to reflect including how an adult's emotions affect their ability to reflect. If a person feels fear or anxiety then they may disengage from the process of reflection (Burns, 1995:16, cited in Dunn, L, 2000).

Sumsion (2000) undertook a 4-year investigation into the changes in pre-service teacher's reflection in Australia; out of eighteen participants, eight failed to become more reflective. Sumsion (2000:201) noted the ability (or not) to become more reflective related to four themes:

- commitment (or lack thereof) to teaching
- commitment (or lack thereof) to reflection
- epistemological perspective
- perception of how supportive the learning environment is to personal professional development

This raises an interesting point around attitude being crucial to reflection that seems to have been ignored by other researchers, but that has been borne out, to some degree, by my experiences with students. Anecdotally, I have found a lack of commitment to reflection to be more evident with, but not exclusive to, students classified as 'under 25' on my OU student lists, with a greater commitment evident the more mature the student.

However, in order to be reflective, it is necessary to have experiences to reflect on. Onyx (2001:135) notes that 'the transformation of an experience by the learners' reflection of the experience within a socio-cultural context is crucial'. It may be that students under-25, lack the breadth of experience to inform their reflections. Chilvers (2005), whilst noting that less experienced, younger students found it harder to reflect on their practice, believed they could learn how to be more reflective if they could be supported in this process and have reflective practice modelled for them. Unfortunately no indication of how, or by whom, this might be

achieved is offered by Chilvers (2005) although it may be fair to assume this needs to be a 'more knowledgeable other'. Mezirow's (2003:61) discussion on transformational learning supports Chilvers' (2005) findings, suggesting that 'age and education are major factors in critical judgment', noting that 'college graduates consistently earn higher scores on tests of reflective judgment'. Mezirow (2003) whilst indicating that adults may developmentally capable of reflection on practice, promotes the role of a tutor in developing the skills and understanding necessary to want to engage in effective critical reflection – an essential component of transformational learning.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING

Transformational learning provides a framework for facilitating critical reflection in the workplace. (Mezirow, 2009:xi) and involves students in examining and questioning their assumptions, values and beliefs about their practice. However, whilst fostering transformative learning is a key aim within adult education and practice based learning in particular, the practice of transformative learning is still not fully understood (Mezirow, 2009:xii). The process of transformational learning is about more than acquiring a skills set; it also involves learners in making [enduring and irreversible] changes to their frames of reference (Choy, 2009:66). It is both an epistemological and ontological process and, for the childminders in my study, it is particularly relevant to consider how a change in the knowledge base they apply to their practice impacts on their identity within the childcare community of practice.

Taylor (2007) identifies a range of essential elements for transformational learning in his critical review of research carried out between 1999 and 2005. I have taken

the elements particularly pertinent to my study for discussion here, focusing on relationships, the support needed and the medium used to foster transformative learning.

Critical reflection, on its own, may effect a change in thinking about practice, but not practice itself. Taylor (2007:181) cites research with teachers by Garvett (2004) indicating the need for explicit guidance and support to effect change. Mezirow (2003:62) also notes the task of adult education to help the student acquire the skills to become critically reflective. The work-based learning modules within the FDEY seem ideally suited to transformational learning, with students using reflective tools, such as the 3 Layer Model, and RPC. Students are required to make links between practice and theory and to use experiences that are meaningful to them as a basis for reflection on their own practice (Taylor, 2007:182).

Support a student needs to foster transformative learning is an under-researched area, but within this literature review there is evidence to suggest a relationship with others is an essential factor in a transformative experience. Taylor (2007:163) suggests the relationship needs to be with someone who will offer mutual support and empathy. However, rather than someone who is supportive, kind and non-threatening, perhaps essential qualities include being challenging, and asking for justification of thinking to create discomfort. If so, this suggests the support is more likely to be effective coming from peers who understand the context and related concepts and principles and are literally 'in the same boat'. Peer dynamics are also noted as being important. Taylor (2007:179) cites Eisen's (2001) research around nursing and peer-based professional development,

identifying the qualities of trust, non-evaluative feedback and non-hierarchical status, among others, as important to the relationship. Could this also mean peers who are perceived as equals and who have some element of commonality – that is, other childminders? With limited relevant research identified, there is the opportunity for further investigation into the qualities needed within a transformative relationship, and how these qualities can be fostered in relation to both childminders and those they choose to reflect with.

In discussing the medium used to foster transformative learning, Taylor (2007:182) notes that 'the written format potentially strengthens the analytical capability of transformative learning'. This written format could encompass a variety of mediums, including reflective journals (Bolton, 2010) or asynchronous online discussions. These are considered as ways of involving, or drawing on, the experiences of others as well as the opportunity to look back on written accounts. The use of the online learning environment, as discussed within Strand 3 of this literature review, offers childminders the opportunity to engage with others within a community of practice with the potential to overcome some of the relationship issues to create appropriate conditions to engage in transformative learning.

What is the tutor's role in transformative learning? The tutor's role of making judgements on reflection within assignments, seemingly creating dynamics that are not suited to the type of relationship. Maybe the tutor's role is more suited to fostering the conditions to allow for the process of transformative learning to take place and to introduce students to the skills needed to adopt a 'skeptical stance' and challenge beliefs and assumptions (Mezirow, 2003:62)?

ROLE OF THE TUTOR

Whilst a student may be in control of certain factors such as attitude, emotional response and personal experience, relating to an ability to reflect, does the tutor also have responsibilities relating to the process?

Rosenstein (2002) suggests that, whilst reflection can be carried out in isolation, a guide is needed to avoid the creation of 'multiple broomsticks of pedagogical errors'. As a 'more knowledgeable other' a tutor has a vital role in supporting childminders to understand the theory behind their practice and to provide them with the skills to enable reflection to take place (Mariage et al, 2000). Whilst Evans (1999) equally suggests a role for the tutor in both teaching and encouraging reflection, he also advocates the value of Vygotsky's 'critical peer perspective' with the teacher's role being to 'encourage students to seek out this perspective'.

Schön (1983) on the other hand, unlike Boud and Walker (1998) and Evans (1999), does not seem to see a role for a tutor in the process, instead seeing learning as coming through reflection in and on practice, rather than through theoretical discussion. Evans (1999:70) whilst accepting that reflection is related to practice, notes that 'students [may] find it difficult to stop 'doing' and reflect [...] and they may need encouragement to [...] reflect. He sees the tutor as 'one individual with whom the student will expect to reflect' (Evans, 1999:70).

Personally, my experiences would refute Evans' (1999) views, with the tutor being the last person a student would choose to reflect with! Distance-learning, can limit the interaction with a tutor, however there are still opportunities for reflection.

Brookfield (Johanson, 2010) in an interview noted an important role for the tutor in modeling critical thinking, something that tutors can offer within written feedback on assignments, within tutorials, or as part of an online discussion. Within my identified research the views are varied and do not take into account the distance-learning perspective. Whilst not identifying a definite role for a tutor, I believe the literature reviewed identifies a role for others (which may include a tutor) in supporting childminder to become an effective reflective practitioner.

SUMMARY

This literature review has highlighted some of the key areas explored within the research, informing the questions asked during both the data collection and analysis. At the start of the literature review I had a primarily anecdotal understanding of how childminders might reflect on their practice. By the end of the literature review for this study, I had a greater understanding of some of the pertinent issues to explore and analyse from the perspective of childminders engaging in reflective practice as a requirement of distance-learning study.

My understanding of the possibilities within questions such as: 'how do they decide with whom to reflect' and 'what are the factors to take into account' developed as I engaged with the literature. The initial focus of the literature review was on Strands 1 and 2, with Strands 3 and 4 developing as I analysed the data and new themes emerged, my literature search expanded.

The next chapter focuses on the methodology and the rationale for how the research was carried out.

Chapter 3 Methodology

INTRODUCTION

The research took a 'radical enquiry' approach (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002) in the sense of revealing gaps in knowledge and providing justification for the rejection of existing knowledge and practices, alongside being conducted within a political framework. This involved looking beyond my own experiences of reflection as a childminder, to explore the experiences of other childminders and to question existing assumptions and perceptions. The research questions required me to explore how the practice of childminders currently enrolled on the FDEY supported or challenged current research findings (explored within the literature reviewed in Chapter 2) that effective reflection requires the input of others.

This chapter will look at how the research questions were investigated and the conceptual framework of my research. It will consider the rationale for choosing questionnaires and interviews and taking a case study approach against other options, including how my background has influenced the choices I have made. It will explain and justify the research techniques by considering the kind of knowledge generated by their use, and the advantages and disadvantages of them, with reference to the research questions.

This chapter will explore the theoretical framework of the study and the research techniques used, for example, the childminders I involved and the decision to conduct telephone interviews. In considering these questions I will bring in the issues of generalisability, validity and reliability.

The methodological framework chosen depends on the research goals, research questions and the researcher's skills, time and funds. These factors will be used to assess the appropriateness of the different methodological options outlined in this Chapter.

As discussed in Chapter 1 in the rationale for the research, there is limited current research involving childminders, and none sourced relating specifically to childminders on distance-learning programmes of study. The intention, therefore, for this study has been to consider some of the existing research into reflective practice and gather information to inform further research. When I started this study I was an AL tutoring on a range of modules within the FDEY. As a result of my background as a childminder and my involvement with both NCMA and the local authority in setting up both pre- and post-registration training packages I have developed a particular research interest in childminders, and I want to develop my understanding of how they can be enabled to become reflective practitioners through studying on the FDEY. These aims have impacted on the methodology employed within this study, as can be seen in the following discussion.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Chia (2002) describes epistemology as 'how and what it is possible to know'. Before considering the research methodology and methods it is necessary to determine what the nature of the knowledge I hope to gain from carrying out the research is, and the scope of that knowledge (Crotty, 2003), given that this research focuses on practice-based enquiry with the intention to create knowledge

in the previously under-researched area of childminders and how they engage in reflective practice.

The research sample is necessarily small and made up of individuals. Although these individuals share a common role as childminders, and are all undertaking a distance-learning Foundation Degree in Early Years, each childminder is unique in terms of their individual profile (see appendix 5). In addition, the childminders are engaged in a qualification that aims to change their perception of reflection and develop their reflective practices - an outcome that is supported by anecdotal evidence. Bearing in mind these factors, this research aims to build an awareness, or tentative knowledge of the factors impacting on how childminders doing distance-learning study engage in reflection with others and become a reflective practitioner. The tentative nature of the knowledge indicates a subjectivist lens (Crotty, 2003).

Whilst there is a tentative nature to any knowledge outcome from this research, my background in childminding and training involving childminders (noted in my biography in Chapter 1), has provided anecdotal evidence that (generally) there are changes to reflective practice and the development of professional identity during study. This study partially seeks to explore and potentially corroborate my existing knowledge, but also to construct new knowledge and identify any themes to inform further research. Although each childminder may have different experiences and, therefore, different views or practices relating to reflective practice resulting in 'multiple truths' (Crotty, 2003), there is also some commonality between childminders. This commonality offers the opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding relating to how childminders could be supported to reflect

effectively on practice by noting any patterns emerging from the research questions and identifying themes for further investigation. These factors suggest knowledge could also be approached through a constructivist lens.

The blurring of a subjectivist and constructivist epistemology is not uncommon in qualitative research (Crotty, 2003) and either would inform theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods to accommodate the exploratory nature of my study within a context where knowledge is neither static, nor objective (Crotty, 2003).

My first decision was to decide whether to undertake qualitative or quantitative research as this would drive many of the decisions around conducting the research.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Quantitative research is seen as a scientific approach to research, involving the researcher in testing hypotheses, and looking for correlation between variables (Grix, 2004:118). There is generally an emphasis on large samples, a reduction of variables and the 'use of techniques that apply more to numerical data' (Grix, 2004:117). Quantitative methodology also involves statistical analysis of data. Although there was the potential for gathering information from a large number of childminders studying the FDEY with The Open University, this would have been problematic for a number of reasons, such as ease of access to childminders and the researcher's time. In addition, the gathering of primarily factual, numerical data, most likely managed through questionnaire responses, would have made it difficult to explore the reasons for responses to questions, and to discuss issues.

Some quantitative methodology was evident, for example, data from the questionnaires were used to attempt to reduce the number of variables between the childminders taking part in the study in order to focus on isolation but, overall, the aims of my study did not lend themselves to this research style. This was due particularly to the study's focus on identifying emergent themes, rather than checking existing knowledge, and no attempt being made to make cause and effect connections between particular variables. Equally, the focus was, of necessity, on a small number of childminders, due to the decision taken to use childminders where there was an additional issue of rural isolation. This limited the number of childminders meeting the selection criteria, making it difficult to find large numbers of potential participants.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is a more open-ended and exploratory research methodology, relating to making knowledge claims based on individual experiences (Creswell, 2003:18). This next section considers how well my research fits within three qualitative methods – ethnography, phenomenology and action research –all of which have the potential to produce data to answer the research questions.

Ethnography

Ethnography has no standard definition and its meaning is variable, and sometimes contested (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:1). There are, however, some core elements that go some way to defining the essence of ethnographic research. Ethnographic research examines groups and their observable and

learned patterns of behaviour, customs and ways of life (Creswell, 2003). It requires the researcher to spend time among the people being studied, documenting their practices and, 'emphasises the importance of understanding things from the point of view of those involved' (Denscombe, 2007:63). An immediate difficulty lies with the fact that although observation could give some concrete evidence of verbal reflection in action, reflection, by its very nature, is not always visible. Observing childminders would also be difficult due to the impact on the validity of any research findings as a result of the Hawthorne Effect (Campbell et al, 2005). The researcher would be very visible due to the intimacy of childminding, affecting behaviour of those being observed.

Although I have a background as a childminder, my current role, and the nature of childminding, made it impossible to immerse myself in the field as a participant in their lives. Nevertheless, in the sense that I have been involved with childminding either directly or indirectly for nearly thirty years, I have 'spent considerable time in the field' (Denscombe, 2007:62) and developed a good understanding of the childminder perspective, although, unlike an ethnographic researcher, I have not been actively studying childminders over this period of time. Rather familiarity with the role, the challenges and individual childminders has enabled me to absorb knowledge and understanding of their perspective. A characteristic feature of ethnography is the significance placed on the impact of 'self' (Denscombe, 2007:69) on the study. This acknowledgement through the inclusion of my biography in Chapter 1 is an indicator that the principles underpinning the way I have engaged with the research are ethnographic.

Ethnographic research is usually small-scale, focusing on a few cases that have something in common (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3). It is not just about presenting the practices of those studies, however, but about how the knowledge and understanding gained can be translated into other practices. As discussed in Chapter 1, to answer my research questions I have chosen to hone in on a particular characteristic, that of isolation. Time factors and the need to develop research skills also meant that the research was small-scale to allow for depth within the study. However, it is intended that the insights gained from this study will have the potential to inform practice in relation to other childminders and groups where there are issues of isolation

Data collection within an ethnographic study is generally diverse, including documentary evidence alongside observation and/or semi-informal discussions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3). Time, and later awareness of the potential of other sources of evidence, impacted on how closely my research design matches with an ethnographic approach. As themes emerged and childminders identified, for example, how they used their assignments and other written documents, such as diaries, as a tool for reflection, it became clear to me there was the potential for greater triangulation by gathering data from documentary sources. In this respect my study omitted features that would have established it more strongly within an ethnographic framework.

The process of data collection within an ethnographic study allows for themes to be generated from the analysis of the data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3). This fits with my study, in that in the initial stages I had no identified pre-conceived answers to my research questions. I have taken an emergent themes approach to

data analysis, as discussed later in this Chapter. However, the other aspect of this unstructured approach to data collection, that 'a fixed and detailed research design is not specified at the start', (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:3) does not fit with my study. My involvement with the childminders taking part in the study was limited as I was not immersed in their daily lives. They were recruited to fill in an initial questionnaire, with a follow-up semi-structured interview to explore issues further. The research design was, therefore, fixed although there was some flexibility to 'go with the flow' during the interviews.

As can be seen from the discussion above, my study would fit within the broad definition of ethnography in that it was looking for similarities between childminders in how they reflect on their practice and the reasons for whom they reflect with, with the aim of developing the opportunities for childminders (as a homogenous group within the student body on the FDEY) to reflect effectively on their practice. Equally, in setting my study in context, and considering the wider picture when analysing the data, there is some acknowledgement of the holistic perspective of ethnography. However, although I have tried to make meaning of the data by interpreting it in relation to the social, cultural and psychological perspectives of ethnography, key elements of the approach, in particular to data collection, and the 'life history approach' (Denscombe, 2007:63) are missing.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology as an approach emphasises subjectivity, description, interpretation and agency (Denscombe, 2007:75). It is a useful methodology for

engaging in small-scale research focusing on determining attitudes and perceptions and, as such, would encompass the research goals of my study.

Phenomenology may be considered to be a human science method: a profoundly reflective inquiry into human meaning (van Manen, 2002). Similarly to ethnography there is no clear definition of phenomenology and some 'controversy surrounding the use of the term' (Denscombe, 2007:76). However, there are some essential characteristics of a phenomenological approach. Essentially the approach has a basis in philosophy and the nature of being, and research focuses on the routine, everyday features of social life. In the sense that my research is focusing on an aspect of a childminder's everyday practice, it would seem to fit within this approach.

The social construction of reality is a key tenet of phenomenology. Participants in research taking this approach are viewed as 'agents' who interpret their experiences and that this interpretation must be shared with others in a similar situation for there to be a basis for communication and common understanding (Denscombe, 2007:79). Phenomenology is particularly useful where the researcher wants to understand how a particular group of people think.

Researchers taking a phenomenological approach would take an area of interest and use, primarily, interviews with a small number of participants to ask 'essence questions' (Creswell et al, 2007:239) to elicit meaning about a phenomenon. In the process of writing up the researcher would engage in a structured approach to data analysis to provide textual and structural description to understand the reflective process identifying themes within the data. Finally, at the end of the study, the researcher would report on the varied experiences of the participants to

offer an understanding of the 'lived experience of persons about a phenomenon' (Creswell et al, 2007:241).

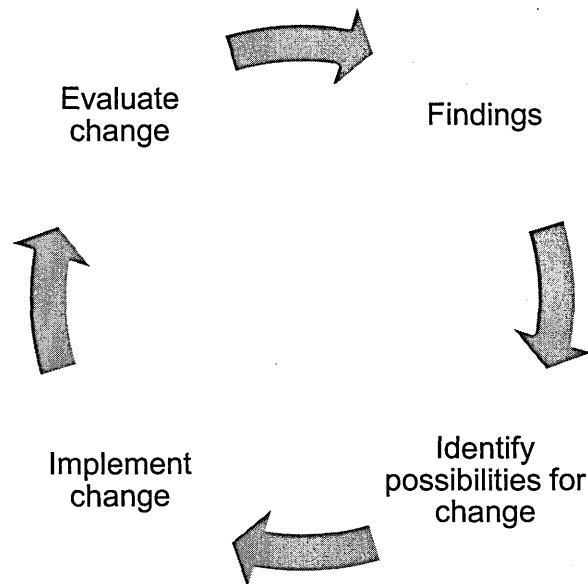
My study fits awkwardly with some of the above criteria for a phenomenological approach to researching practice. As the researcher I am interested in reflection and the initial process of researching how childminders reflect on their practice involved interviewing a small number of childminders, and then identifying themes from the analysis of the data. However, taking this approach would lead me away from my research aim of using the research questions to focus on making changes to practice. There is some commonality, in that identifying themes within the research data allowed for a greater understanding of how and why childminders reflect on their practice. The focus of phenomenology, however, would be on description of the data to facilitate understanding by 'presenting the experiences in a way that is faithful to the original' (Denscombe, 2007:78), rather than analysing the data to facilitate problem-solving.

Action Research

Action research can be defined in a number of different ways (Kemmis, 1993; Matheson and Matheson, 2004) although it is usually taken to mean small-scale research undertaken by a practitioner leading to greater understanding of, and improvements or development to, their own practice. Stenhouse (1979, cited in Cohen et al, 2000), however, suggests that action research should not only contribute to a practitioner's own practice, but should also be accessible to others, thereby contributing to the practice of others. Denscombe (2007:123) puts forward four defining features of action research:

- Involved with practical issues
- Change is an integral part of the research
- Cycle of research (see Figure 4)
- Practitioners take an active part in the research

Figure 4 Cyclical process of action research



Once findings have been evaluated the process restarts with a further investigation (Denscombe, 2007:123)

Initially the intended focus of this study was on supporting the development of my own practice as an AL, meeting the definitions of action research as practitioner-led (Denscombe, 2007:127) and a 'powerful tool for change and improvement at a local level' (Cohen et al, 2000:226).

With the changes to my role, and the difficulties in recruiting childminders within my own tutorial groups, the research focus altered to consider more generally how

childminders could be supported to reflect effectively on their practice and who could support them, rather than how I could support them in my own role as their tutor. This change in focus happened early on as a result of feedback on my initial study and, as a result, the research questions are broader than my own practice, although they can be applied to my own practice to comply with my desire to improve as a practitioner. My research does not, therefore, fit comfortably with action research with regard to the focus and breadth of the research.

In noting the inherent danger in action research of 'examining one's practice at very close distance' and 'losing sight of the bigger picture that surrounds it' Matheson and Matheson (2004:185) suggest action research is very insular. By looking at a broader picture rather than examining my own practice in isolation my research only partially complied with the definitions of action research discussed in this section, although the cyclical process of action research remained as an aim of my research.

Whilst my research contains key features of action research these are insufficient to align it completely to this research method. In common with many other types of research my study takes elements of a number of different qualitative approaches (Creswell et al, 2007:236) to gain the best outcome for my research.. The next section explores the decisions taken around the strategies used to gather appropriate data to answer the research questions.

A case study

This section considers the appropriateness of a case study approach. As part of this consideration a central question is 'what constitutes a case' (Mason, 2002:167). Cohen et al (2000:181-5) note a range of definitions, while Kemmis (1980, cited in Stake, 1998:87) notes 'the concept of case remains open to debate'.

Childminders studying on The Open University Foundation Degree in Early Years - a distance-learning programme, can be seen as 'the bounded system' (Smith, 1978, cited in Stake, 1998:87). Each individual childminder within this system is unique and therefore, a case study. Nevertheless, whilst all childminders are individuals, there are essential elements of overall commonality, for example, childminders are generally the only childcare professional in their setting, that contribute to each case study being 'a concentrated inquiry, [however,] into a single case' (Stake, 1998:87).

Yin (2003) notes the relevance of a case study approach where the researcher is asking 'how' and 'why' questions, fitting in with my own research, as can be seen from my questionnaire in Appendix x. In using a number of cases I was able to engage in cross-case analysis (Schwandt, 2001:47) to consider whether there was any commonality between responses. This methodology offered the opportunity to identify whether a similarity in profession and style of study resulted in similar findings. Choosing cases that had some essential differences between them offered the opportunity to broaden the scope, and practical usefulness to childminder students and tutors. As noted by Stake (1995, cited in Schwandt,

2001:47) I did not choose cases because I felt they were representative, as there are too many variables to make this a viable option; rather I chose cases to draw out some of the essential differences between childminders in order to give a broad spread of perspectives. By doing this I hoped to be able to gather some rich data to develop an understanding of the issues and challenges for childminders to becoming reflective practitioners. Therefore, whilst it may not be possible to generalise from a case study, the use of a 'case study approach can contribute to the cumulative development of knowledge' (Flyvbjerg, 2006:241), as in this thesis..

DATA COLLECTION

In deciding how to collect the data I considered a variety of options. Certain methods of data collection with the potential to answer my research questions were rejected for the reasons given here.

To answer my research questions it was important to ascertain reasons why and how the childminders worked in certain ways, or reflected with certain people, Data, therefore, needed to consist of more than 'yes' or 'no' answers. In addition, the investigative nature of the study required free responses.

A desire to meet the EdD timescales led to a decision to rely on the childminders' own assessment of changes to their understanding and increased reflection. The use of questionnaires and follow-up interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of the issues raised and offered a degree of triangulation by looking for any contradictions or supporting evidence from the practice examples given within the interviews.

Those childminders belonging to my own tutorial groups provided the opportunity for more tangible evidence to assess their reflective practice through assignments and tutorial discussion, both on-line and face-to-face. However, this was not equitable as six childminders did not belong to my tutorial groups. A comment made by P also suggested assignments may not provide useful material to reflect on practice:

I would not necessarily pick what they are asking us to think about to reflect on...I find myself looking for an activity that looks impressive...something that you are going to say 'Wow, what a fantastic activity...' Also, it is human nature to pick something you have done well for the assignment rather than something that has gone wrong! (P)

In exploring other ways of providing evidence of reflection I considered asking all childminders to keep a reflective log. However, this would have been an onerous undertaking and was not considered to meet with ethical guidance. This has been discussed under 'research design'. The decision was, therefore, taken to use only questionnaires and in-depth interviews, with follow-up conversations as and when points needed clarifying or expanding.

These were chosen as the most effective way of gathering data for a variety of reasons. Some of these were as a result of factors beyond my control, such as insufficient numbers of childminders within my own tutorial groups fitting the

selection criteria. Other reasons related to the type of information I wanted to collect and the time/resources available.

Questionnaires

The nature of my study required me to be selective in the childminders taking part in the study. There needed, therefore, to be some way of making an initial selection from childminders undertaking the FDEY. The use of an initial questionnaire (Appendix 7) was planned for several reasons. Primarily these reasons were: to get some background biographical, information (such as age, schooling, length of childcare experience etc.) to inform the analysis of the data (Nias, 2003); the gathering of a range of information relating to the research focus to inform the interview questions (Tizard and Hughes, 1991); and to allow for selection of interviewees.

Selecting a postal/e-mail questionnaire to gather background information on each childminder provided a way of filtering out childminders who did not meet my criteria. I was then able to be selective on the basis of the responses given, to ensure I maximised some variables, such as age, but minimised others, such as location.

Questionnaires on their own would not provide the opportunity to follow up responses, but asking very open questions ran the risk that the responses would be too diverse to be able to identify any commonality between issues. I therefore devised a questionnaire containing objective, structured attitudinal and open-ended attitudinal questions (Bell and Raffe, 1991:131-2) to provide some starting

points for further data collection through interview follow-up to clarify answers, where necessary. This was considered to be the most economical in terms of time; and the most flexible for geographically dispersed, self-employed respondents with busy, erratic schedules.

Focus groups

Being able to engage in dialogue with childminders was an important aspect of my study. I, therefore, considered the different ways this could be done. At the beginning of the study I had expected to use my own students and, therefore, considered the option of using focus groups where the childminders could discuss the research questions amongst themselves. A focus group offered the opportunity for me to take more of an observer role (Cohen et al, 2000:288), and reduced the possibility that I would give my own views away within a discussion. The problems with exposing my own views during the interview have been discussed later within this chapter under methodological issues

With no previous published research around how childminders reflect on their practice, focus groups offered the possibility of allowing the views of the childminders to emerge with the focus on generating hypotheses from the data and insights of the group (Cohen et al, 2000:288), rather than starting from my own thinking, in a similar way to Clarke's Mosaic approach and listening to the child (Clark and Moss, 2001). This data could be then used as a basis for further interviews with individual childminders, or future research. They are economical on time and offer the potential for a quantity of data in a short space of time. One strength would have been that the childminders could bounce ideas off of each

other and provide their views on issues that they might not have thought about on their own. However, these strengths can be turned round to being weaknesses in that one childminder may dominate the discussion and others may feel intimidated, leading to skewed data. There were also other disadvantages that led me away from exploring their use further. Not least were the logistical disadvantages that came with focusing on childminders for whom isolation was an issue. Within my tutorial groups there were other childcare workers than childminders making it impossible to hold the focus group as part of the tutorial, but holding a focus group after a tutorial not only impinged on the childminders' own time and schedules, but many travelled long distances to attend. Equally there was only the potential for getting four childminders together and a focus group works best when there are sufficient people to ensure the effect of inter-group dynamics are minimised and that there is sufficient interaction between the participants

Interviews

Although focus groups could generate the kind of data required for the study they were rejected as impractical. Interviewing, in some form, however, offered the opportunity to elicit the views of individual childminders. An interview offers the opportunity for the childminders to express their point of view and explain why they do what they do, and expand on their answers to the questionnaire, providing access to what is inside the childminder's head (Tuckman, 1972, cited in Cohen et al, 2000)

There are different types of interview, including structured or unstructured, and face-to-face or telephone. Although a focus group was not logistically possible,

as far as possible I wanted to give childminders the opportunity to express their own opinions against the research questions. It was, therefore, important to have some structure but not a rigid framework. Aside of the practical issues that drove my decisions, I wanted to use methods that would avoid bias. Carrying out telephone interviews would remove some of the opportunities for the childminders to make assumptions as to my own views, based on visible features such as age and ethnicity. For example, they could assume the value of family, or life experiences. Telephone interviews also allowed me to select childminders from a wider geographical area. This was an important consideration to recruit childminders who had issues of isolation. Telephone interviews are not, however, ideal as they are intensive; with the interviewer and interviewee both needing to keep up a constant dialogue between them.

The lack of visual clues also means that it is not always possible to tell how the childminder is responding. They did, however, meet my purpose of being able to reach childminders fitting my specific requirements.

Combination of questionnaires and follow-up interviews

The use of questionnaires and follow-up interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of the issues raised and offered a degree of triangulation by looking for any contradictions or supporting evidence from the practice examples given within the interviews.

How the interviews were carried out and the impact of this on quality of the data has been discussed in the next Chapter on research design.

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored some of the decisions taken around the approaches and strategies employed within the study. It has explained the rationale for choices made against the research questions. Leading on from this chapter, in the next chapter on research design I consider how I carried out the research and any impact on the research questions.

Chapter 4 Research design

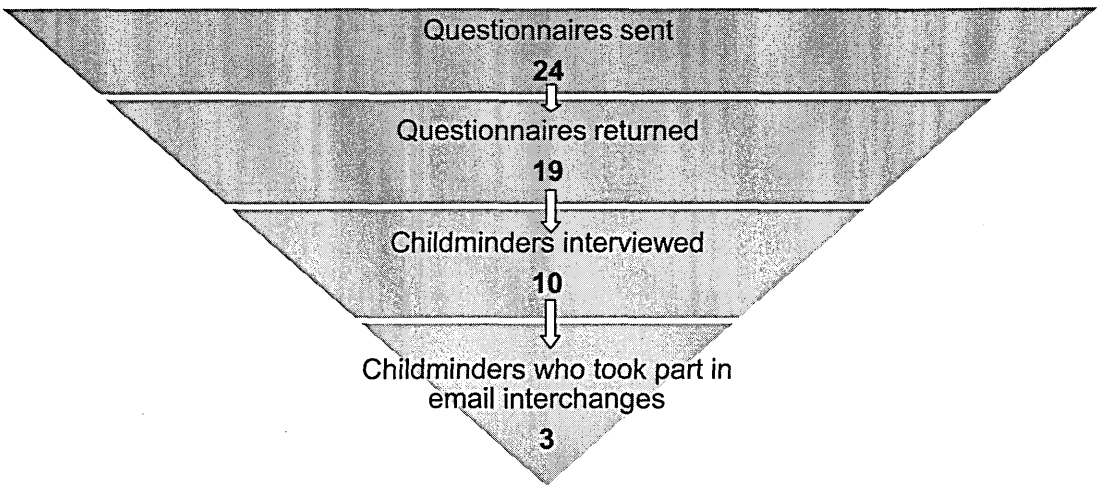
Leading on from the methodology chapter which looks at *why* I made certain decisions over research methods, Chapter 4 will consider *how* I carried out the research, and the tools used, and any impact on the research questions. It will consider how I contacted the childminders and the challenges involved in this and the process of data collection and analysis.

Ethical issues involved in the research and how they were addressed, including locating myself, as the researcher, within the research process have been addressed throughout this chapter, with an overall summary statement at the end.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

The research took place over a three-year period from 2006 – 2009 and involved childminders, studying various modules on The Open University FDEY. Data were gathered by questionnaire, telephone interviews and email exchange. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis.

Figure 5 Number of childminders involved in each element of the research



Questionnaires were sent to twenty-four childminders, nineteen of whom returned their questionnaires within the requested timeframe. From the nineteen promptly returned questionnaires, ten childminders were selected to take part in an interview. In line with Eckstein's (1975, cited in Flyvbjerg, 2006:229) argument that case studies are better for testing hypotheses than for producing them, I selected a number of childminders who had specific differences in their questionnaire responses. Using an information-orientated selection (Flyvbjerg, 2006:230) to maximise the opportunity to gather potentially useful information, childminders were chosen to maximise some variables, and minimise others (Appendix 5). These variables related to my research questions around factors influencing reflection and access to others to reflect with, to maximize the range of reasons for reflecting with others.

SELECTION OF CHILDMINDERS

Having decided on a case study approach the decision had to be taken around selecting individual childminders. This involved several key decisions. As each childminder is, essentially, an individual case, but with some commonality, I had to consider the importance of not being *able to choose* to interact with others face-to-face, against *choosing not to* for a range of reasons. To answer my research questions I made the decision that the lack of choice, rather than the making of a conscious choice was a key issue within my research.

Two of the research questions focus on investigating how childminders' understanding of reflective practice, and the use of reflection changed during their studies. My original intention had been to select childminders from my own tutor groups across the FDEY. However, not only were there few childminders in my

groups within this period, but most did not fully fit my criteria, in relation to the isolating factors of rurality and limited face-to-face access to others within the childcare profession. By selecting childminders on a range of modules I hoped to identify and consider any bias caused by the impact the module structure and expectations may have had on childminder responses, particularly around the use of ICT for reflecting on practice.

The FDEY comprises of 120 points of study at Level 1 and, similarly, 120 points at Level 2 (see Appendix 2) with the final modules at each Level specifically covering the skills needed to reflect effectively on practice. The nature of Open University study means that, theoretically students can choose the order in which they study modules. However, in reality, the structure of the FDEY means that most students study E123 and E124 before studying E115, and E115 study must be completed before embarking on E215. The module childminders were studying would, therefore, impact on how effectively evidence of *change* could be discussed and several options were considered, and rejected before selecting childminders to take part in in-depth interviews.

Selecting childminders who were at different points of study offered the opportunity to see whether there were any differences in reflective practice. My tutoring experience suggested that childminders' awareness of reflection, and how to engage in it, is heightened by study. Therefore study is often the catalyst for becoming a reflective practitioner, creating the need to find people to reflect with. The assumption at this stage was that childminders embarking on the FDEY felt they have less need to, or attach less importance to, reflecting with others. However, in my experience, those students who reflect at this point in their studies

tended to go on to reflect more effectively on the work-based learning modules. I, therefore, saw it as important to gather the views of these childminders on how, when, why and with whom they reflect, what aids this reflection. As there is no on-line component to these early modules I also hoped to get a different perspective on on-line reflection.

However, this raised issues of generalisability as all childminders are unique and, therefore, conclusions cannot be drawn from individual childminder responses and applied to all childminders. Selecting, and sending a questionnaire to, childminders who are at the start of their studies and then repeating this a year later, offered the potential to make an analysis of whether there is any difference in the level of reflection (van Manen, 197; Bain et al, 1999) and their awareness of reflecting on their practice, as they progress through their studies. Following a number of students through from the start of their qualification to the end would have enabled me to chart any development in the reflective process as a result of study. Although I felt this would give the best picture of the impact of studying for the Foundation Degree on becoming a reflective practitioner, there were a number of difficulties with this option:

- As I did not work with any childminders on E123 in the pilot phase it would have meant taking a year out of the EdD programme to gather data as the FD route takes 3 years, minimum
- It was dependent on the chosen participants staying with the module and continuing to be willing to be part of my study
- There was a resource issue in starting with more participants than required to allow for any drop-out

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

An initial study carried out in the first year of the EdD, indicated that childminders who lived and worked in physical isolation from other childminders had different issues with regard to reflecting on practice than childminders who could easily meet with others within the same profession. This resulted in the decision to be selective when recruiting childminders to take part in the research in an attempt to minimise variables within the target group. The target group became: childminders, with no other childcare role, studying on a distance-learning module of The Open University's FDEY, and without regular face-to-face contact with other childminders. This target group informed the focus on rural isolation discussed in Chapter 1.

Childminders were recruited onto the research project initially from my own tutorial groups across the FDEY. However, not only were there few childminders in my groups within the data-gathering period, but most did not fully fit my criteria for isolation. Requests to other tutors within my Region to identify possible childminders elicited only minimal response and, therefore, childminders were recruited through the on-line FirstClass forums across the FDEY. As a forum moderator for E115, E215 and the FDEY forums, I had access to childminders making use of the FirstClass forums across the whole country. With there being no ethics restrictions on posting a request, after gaining permission from the respective module Chairs, a request for participants in the research was made on five forums (see Appendix 10).

There were ethical issues around the way in which participants were selected and the childminder's decision to take part. One issue was that of power. As an AL on

The Open University FDEY, and a moderator on several of the student forums, even where I did not use my own students, the participants were aware of my role and that I could have contact with their own tutor. Not only was there the possibility that this impacted on the honesty of participant response, but it also raised the issue of whether potential participants would find it difficult to say 'no' to taking part, and feel forced into taking part. To overcome this I was upfront with potential participants about my role within the OU and explicit about their right not to take part. Conversely, during initial discussions with my own students, it was pointed out (with humour) that there would be no preferential treatment for taking part.

Well... when you look at my TMAs...well the thing is... (H)

I'm afraid you won't get any Brownie points when I mark your
TMA [*light-hearted tone*] (S)

A student's potential fears were also allayed as to what I might do with the information.

Yes [*light-hearted voice tone*] You're going to be striking
some of us off aren't you! Some of us will get letters saying
'You are not worthy to be a childminder' (E)
Nooo...I wouldn't do that...what power do you think I have?
[*laughter*] (S)

All my students were aware that I was engaging in research, through my introductory letter, which briefly noted my studies and that I understood life as a

student. Once I was aware that students were childminders they were approached, individually, via their FirstClass mailbox, given a brief outline of my research, and asked to respond if willing to take part in my research. Where childminders were recruited from the on-line forums (Appendix 10), they were asked to reply to my FirstClass mailbox, including their contact details. All childminders took part in an informal initial verbal discussion, led by me, about what taking part in the research would entail before committing themselves to taking part. Discussion at the end of a tutorial, or a telephone call allowed for an immediate exchange of information and for any questions to be answered. To guard against individuals feeling pressured to participate they were asked not to make an immediate decision, but to come back to me within a given timescale. If they agreed to participate a questionnaire was sent out, which could be completed anonymously, if they wished. Attached to the questionnaire was an information sheet giving them information about the research and reiterating in writing their commitment, alongside assurance around anonymity (see Appendix 11).

This prior discussion with each childminder, explaining both my interest in the project and the potential outcomes, and the information sheet on the research, not only complied with an ethical requirement that participants should give informed consent (Denscombe, 2007:145), but were important to establish respondents' goodwill towards the research (Mortimer, 1991), and, hence, willingness to participate. This was borne out by the 100% response rate for questionnaire return, although not all questionnaires were returned within the requested time frame.

Bias was impossible to overcome in the final selection of participants for the study, and this has, therefore, been acknowledged within the findings in the data analysis chapter. Childminders were free to respond to the request to take part in the study and, therefore, the final choice of participants was taken from a self-selecting group of childminders. Eleven of the childminders taking part in the study were from my own tutorial groups, with the other eight recruited from on-line forums. This introduced a bias towards childminders who made good use of IT to communicate with others. With The Open University moving towards greater use of technology to support students I do not see this as a negative aspect of my study. Rather, I hope that this has enabled a more useful exploration of factors influencing a childminder when deciding whom to reflect with where they are unable to meet with other childcarers face-to-face. By (anonymously) discussing the responses of those who use technology with those that don't and vice versa, within the interviews I aimed to gain a greater understanding of the issues impacting on how, and with whom, childminders reflect on their practice, particularly where the mode of study includes options for e-communication.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

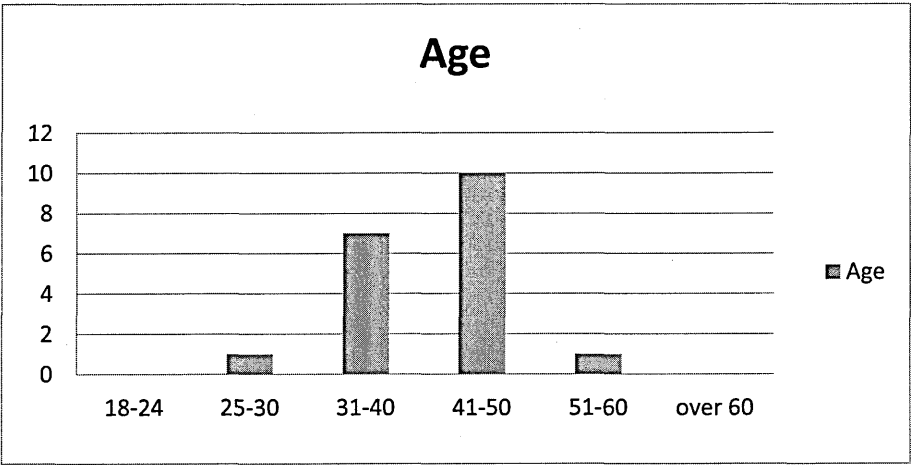
As previously discussed, an opportunity sampling technique (Mertler and Charles, 2005:143) was employed to select participants in the research, using childminders who were available, rather than seen to be representative in some way.

Nevertheless an analysis of the profile of the childminders taking part would seem to suggest they are fairly typical of the childminder workforce (see Appendices 5 and 6).

The childminders broadly fit within the typical childminder profile of being in the 35-44 age bracket (see Figure 6) and female (Nicholson et al, 2008; NCMA, 2008). However, with thirteen of the nineteen childminders having a qualification at Level 4 on the National Qualifications Framework (QCA, 2006) they are better qualified than childminders identified in the NCMA 2008 Membership Survey where 50% of childminders are qualified at either Level 2 or 3 and 11% had no qualifications. The questionnaire responses providing general background information (see Appendix 7) have been collated into the following Figures.

Childminders were asked to indicate their age within broad bands. These clearly indicate that, with two exceptions (the lower and upper age bands), all childminders taking part in the research are typical in age of the childminder workforce (Figure 6).

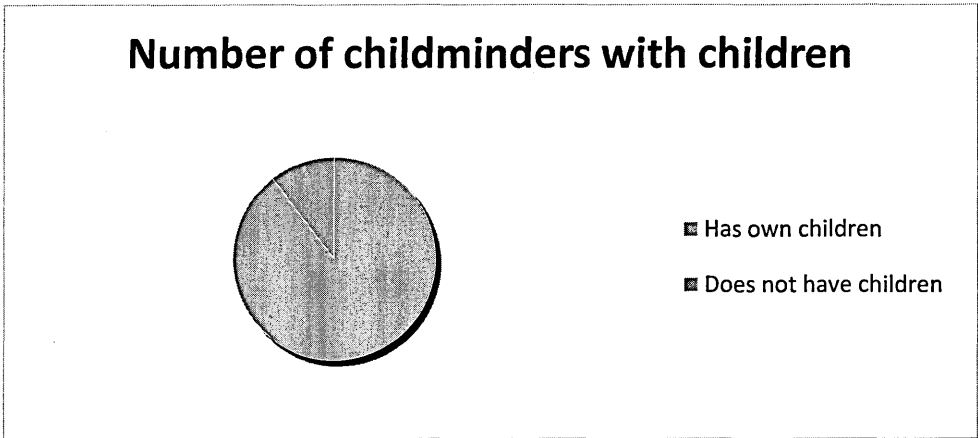
Figure 6 Age of participants



The childminders were asked to indicate whether or not they had their own children, by circling ‘yes’ or ‘no’. They were not asked their reasons for becoming a childminder, although most of those interviewed revealed this as part of general discussion.

The most common reason for becoming a childminder is having young children and needing home-based employment that fits in with family commitments. The reasons for becoming a childminder are not part of the focus of this research. However, the overwhelming number of participants in the research having their own children (Figure 7) suggests they came to childminding for personal, rather than professional reasons, raising issues around how they perceive themselves professionally and their reasons for reflecting on practice. This is a key focus of discussion within the data analysis chapter.

Figure 7 Number of participants with children

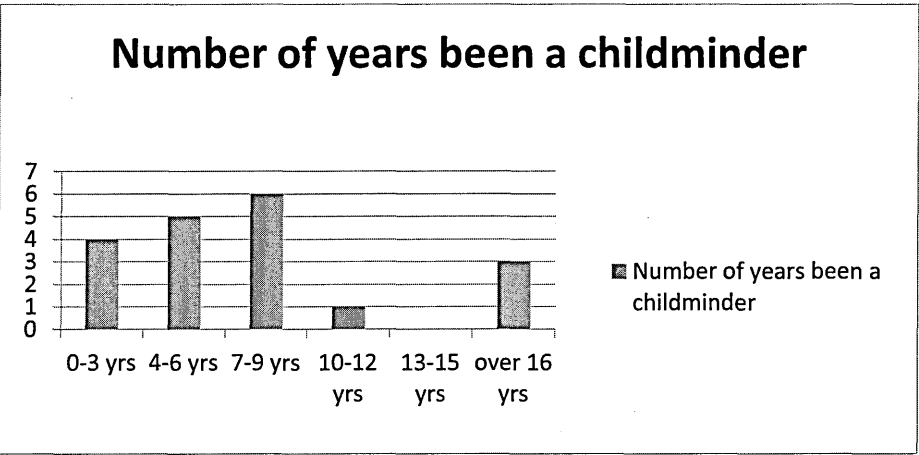


The questionnaire asked the childminders to state how many years they had been childminding. This information has been collated and grouped to give a broad indication of the length of time they have been working as a childminder (Figure 8). More than 50% have been childminding seven years or more, and over 75% four years or more. This is in line with the NCMA Membership Survey (NCMA, 2008) which shows that 41% of childminders have been childminding over six years and 65% over three years.

Undertaking study may be one reason for the higher percentage of childminders who have childminded more than three years. Those childminding for less than three years had, without exception, had other childcare experience. Childminding for a number of years could indicate that they see themselves as having a career either in childminding or in childcare and, potentially, provide a purpose to reflecting on, and developing their practice.

My long-term goal is to work in a school as a teaching assistant, so, at the end of this I will have a qualification that will impress the head teacher, and, along the way, it has improved my childminding. (C)

Figure 8 Number of years participants have been childminding

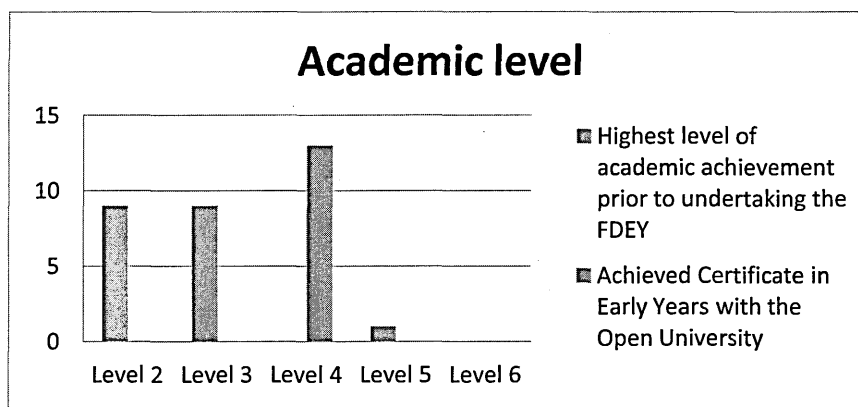


The age of participants, the fact that most have children, and the number of years participants have been childminding suggests a wealth of childcare experience and practical knowledge to draw on. This offered a good basis for reflection, and, perhaps the confidence to reflect with others.

The childminders were asked to tick their highest level of previous achievement. The structure of the Foundation Degree in Early Years allows students to opt to accept the Certificate in Early Years, a Level 4 qualification, after completing the first two modules (E123 and E124). It can clearly be seen, therefore, that the vast majority of participants in my research were some way into their studies and had, therefore, been introduced to specific tools for reflection, such as the questions within the four stages of the Reflective Practice Cycle (see Appendix 4).

No attempt was made to categorise the types of qualification gained within the different levels (QCA, 2006) as this study does not consider the impact of skills gained from previous study when thinking about the level of reflection undertaken by childminders.

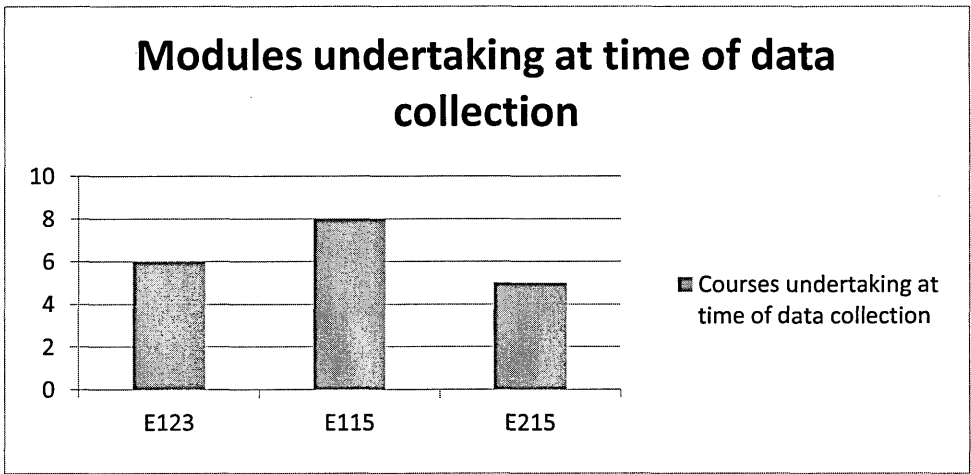
Figure 9 Academic level of participants



For reasons discussed in the methodology chapter, when considering the selection of childminders there was a deliberate attempt to have an equal spread across the modules within the FDEY that have a link with practice (Figure 10). This was not been entirely possible, however, as changes in my module allocation meant that I had no direct access to students on E124, and none came forward

from the request put out on the forums (Appendix 10). The higher number of childminders undertaking the two work-based learning modules resulted in the majority of participants being familiar with the concept of reflective practice. The different responses from students studying on E123 offered a potential opportunity to corroborate the views expressed by childminders studying the later modules in the FDEY as to the value of using a framework for reflection and the impact of study on reflective practice. Whilst this was not a specific focus of the data analysis, it gave an added dimension when considering the possibilities for further research.

Figure 10 Modules participants were studying at time of data collection



Where, perhaps, the childminders were not so typical of the historical childminding workforce, was in their attitude towards childminding as a profession and their drive to develop as professionals. However, the findings of the recent research study into childminding practice in the 21st century by the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) (Fauth et al, 2011) would suggest their attitudes and views are in

line with that of the 'new' childminder emerging since the introduction of the EYFS (DCSF, 2008b).

The childminders responding to my request fell into two key bands – either they were very positive about childminding as a profession and/or they had an interest in research.

Childminding has always been something that I have championed as the best possible childcare option, so would love to help. **(B)**

...have signed up for next module to make BA/EYPS & will prob (*sic*) go on for Honours maybe more – just can't get enough of the research! **(H)**

This, perhaps, should not have been surprising given that these childminders were engaging in their own investigations into their practice, but it did mean that, potentially, the childminders came with their own agenda, and this potential for bias has been taken into account within the data analysis.. For example, some childminders were very pro-childminding and in the sense of wanting to 'sell' childminding these childminders may have been less like to tell me anything they felt was negative.

DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaires

The appearance and layout of the questionnaire was in accordance with the 'common-sense guidelines' suggested by Bell (1993). The questionnaire was typed and laid out with clear headings, succinct instructions and plenty of white space, rather than dense type. Care was taken over the order of the questions, with straight-forward questions first, moving onto questions requiring more thought, and a designated amount of space was given for question responses, so the respondents had an idea of the expectations

Respondents were asked to put their name on the questionnaire (Verma and Mallick, 1999:121) to enable follow-up interviews to take place. Although an option was given at the beginning of the questionnaire to omit any information they felt unhappy about supplying (which could include their name), all questions were answered by all respondents.

The range of formats for the structured questions were chosen to supply potentially useful raw data at the analysis stage (Youngman, 1986, cited in Bell, 1993). In order to make a crude assessment of how students view the importance of different factors impacting on effectiveness of reflection, I used the Likert scale (Cohen et al, 2000:253) for questions relating to views on reflective practice, interaction with others and the role of module materials and tutorials, for students to circle. In part, this was intended to build in a degree of differentiation whilst still providing comparable data in order to make informed decisions on similarities and differences in childminders when selecting participants for interviews. Students

were then asked to expand upon, and give reasons for, their choice (Appendix 7 Q6-8 and 14-16). This information then informed the interview questions.

Respondents were provided with an introductory page setting out the purpose of the research (Appendix 11). This explained why I targeted childminders on a distance-learning programme of study and what I hoped to find out from the research. Explanations were given as to why I was asking certain questions, for example:

‘Questions 8-12 look at the importance, or not, of interaction with others when engaging in reflective practice.’

These explanations were provided to encourage respondents to become informed participants who had an understanding of the purpose of the questionnaire (Cohen et al, 2000:258). It was hoped that this would make participants feel valued, and therefore, more likely to complete and return the entire questionnaire. Within this introduction I tried to show how the research was relevant to them to, equally, encourage a response.

‘I hope to be able to identify some of the issues related to effective reflection, for childminders, on a distance-learning programme of study [... and to see] if there are any improvements that can be considered.’

Reflection can be interpreted in many different ways (as outlined in the literature review). The childminders were, therefore, supplied with a definition with the

questionnaire to try to ensure parity in interpretation (Appendix 8). The interview questions enabled participants to discuss reflection in relation to their own practice, and to give examples to support their responses.

Once questionnaires had been returned childminders were selected to take part in a semi-structured interview (Robson, 2002:270), to probe and explore their questionnaire responses. The number of childminders chosen was determined by time factors involved in setting up the interviews, and transcribing the data.

Interviews

At the planning stage I considered different ways of carrying out the interviews, such as face-to-face, or telephone; one interview, or several shorter ones. For equity and practical purposes, I decided on all telephone interviews. Few childminders were close enough for me to visit, and, therefore, although, ideally, it may have been better to conduct several shorter interviews to allow for clarification resulting from an initial analysis of the data and to fit the gathering of data more effectively into the participant's day, it was not time-effective. There was also the concern that the visible presence of a recording device could impact on natural conversation. .

There were logistical problems to overcome in the timing of interviews. Some childminders worked a long day and, as solo workers, were not, able to delegate during their working day. Interviews either took place outside the working day, impinging on their private life or during the day when the interview was liable to interruptions. One interview took place while the baby she was childminding had

her midday nap. Overcoming these issues required flexibility on my part and goodwill on the part of the childminder. It also meant that conditions were sometimes less than ideal for the childminder to think coherently, as these two examples show..

'I'm sorry... I can't think...it's been a long day! (E)

'Can we arrange another time – P has just woken up (C)

Childminders were given an estimate of between half an hour and an hour for an interview. With hindsight allocating more time for interviewing would have allowed for greater probing within the discussion. It was not ethical to expect childminders to extend an interview beyond the agreed limit or have more than one, and, as a result, some issues were only touched on. Also further questions often only came to light at the analysis stage and it would have been helpful to have set up the expectation for several discussion points from the outset, rather than relying on the goodwill of childminders to continue to input into the research.

Interviews were recorded, with the childminders' agreement, using a small Digital Voice Recorder, This meant that I was able to fully concentrate on the discussion and pick up on key points raised, rather than having to focus on note taking. In addition, the ability to store data from the Voice Recorder on the computer as MP3 files enabled me to refer back to the full interviews, rather than having to be selective at the recording stage due to not being able to take down verbatim notes. The analysis element of the research design has been discussed more fully in the data analysis chapter.

The interview questions were open-ended (Cohen et al, 2000:247) and interviews were semi-structured to allow for issues to be explored as they arose in the course of the interview, whilst still keeping within certain boundaries. During the interviews I maximised 'cue questions' (Ball, 1991:179), in order to elicit responses to certain key themes, whilst also allowing the respondents to say what they wanted to say and avoiding leading to an answer. This ensured each interview covered roughly similar ground, making for easier analysis and minimising the difficulties identified by Nias (2003) of analysing free-flowing conversation in the identification of themes.

To overcome the dilemma discussed within the methodology chapter around evidencing a change in the childminders' understanding of reflection and an increase in reflection a number of field questions were asked that directly related to the research questions.

You have said – in your questionnaire – that there is a difference in how often you reflected on your practice before study and since..... You now do it in a more formal way **(S)**

Yes, I do! **(H)**

So, I wondered if you could elaborate and tell me what you actually meant by that? **(S)**

I also asked childminders to provide examples of what they did before and how they feel this shows a change.

But going back to reflecting.....I suppose I do reflect
on thinking how was I with that particular activity but
only as far as that is concerned, Sue, I don't think I think
too much about what else I do.....Sounds awful
doesn't it? (H)

No..... (S)

I suppose I always think of the children and put them
firstand as long as I am there for them and doing
what I think I am doing right....for them.... That is the
most important thing for me (H)

E-mail correspondence

At the end of their interview three childminders voluntarily offered me the opportunity to contact them at a future stage of the research. As I began to interpret the data and consider what key factors for childminders might be around engaging in reflection with others and becoming a reflective practitioner, further questions were put into an email to these childminders. Their responses provided data targeted on tentative findings relating to the research questions. This enabled me to put forward recommendations with the potential to be both relevant and accessible to childminders undertaking distance-learning study.

DATA ANALYSIS DECISIONS

The data were analysed using theme analysis (Dawson, 2007:120). In addition to recording the interview, handwritten notes were made of anything that appeared to be significant. Then, as the interview data were transcribed onto the computer,

notes were made of anything that appeared to have significance, by using comment boxes. This identified some emergent key themes against the research questions. The data were returned to over the period of a year to note any further analysis, both in the light of later interviews, and the reading of relevant literature as part of the literature review. At the writing up stage of the thesis, after a significant break, a fresh eye, noted further themes and connections within the data.

There were potential benefits to using computer software to assist with the process of data analysis, not least the opportunity to 'code, search and retrieve' more quickly and effectively (Searle, 2005). However, ideally data analysis software should be used from the start, rather than gathering large amounts of data first (Blaxter et al, 2001) and in the early stages of the EdD I lacked confidence with the technology. This hesitance in committing to using software led to the use of word-processing tools to present data and highlight key themes on the interview scripts (Appendix 13).

With my research fitting within an interpretive paradigm, when analysing the data it has been important to consider 'the researcher's self' (Denscombe, 2007:300) and recognise where I may have given away my own perspective. Keeping an open mind was important during the constant revisiting of the data to ensure objectivity within the analysis (Denscombe, 2007:301). With no contextually- similar existing research and the exploratory aim of the research, there was no hypothesis to prove. Where analysis has identified differences within the data these have been used to pose questions and identify further research opportunities.

I had wanted the interviews to be semi-structured and evolve within a basic structure. This, alongside the deliberate conversational style adopted to try to draw out the childminders' views whilst allowing new insights into the research questions to emerge, resulted in some discussion that was not relevant to my research focus. The transcribed interviews contain a basic summary of this discussion to show the overall content. The rationale for this being that if I felt this to be significant later on I could go back to the full recording stored on my computer or the original tapes and transcribe the relevant section.

While transcribing the interviews I noted any points that leapt out at me from the data as brief notes in the margin using the 'add comment' feature on the computer program. Although relating to the broad research questions, these initial thoughts were random and no attempt was made to look for anything specific.

Once an interview was transcribed I made an initial close reading of the data (Boulton and Hammersley, 1996:290). At this point I looked for comments directly relating to points others had made as well as new ideas, and made any links to relevant research. For example, when transcribing H's interview I noted she felt marginalized within the childcare profession (Nurse, 2007:3) in relation to professional identity.

I'm just a childminder...I think the nursery teacher sees
me as a carer, not an educator... (H)

This process has been repeated at intervals, as I continue to read other research and a fresh eye has frequently noted something new in the material. Comments were colour-coded to make it easier to track different ideas and to provide visual

clues as to the number of times a theme reoccurred. The recording of the frequency of a particular theme reoccurring also went some way towards strengthening my findings.

ETHICAL ISSUES

In this section the importance of addressing research ethics are discussed, alongside ethical issues relating to data collection and the participants involved additional to those already mentioned within this chapter.

To establish whether my research required approval from The Open University Ethics committee, I initially consulted the Research Ethics website. This provided the necessary information to ensure that, as an OU student, I complied with the 'Code of practice for research and those conducting research' and adhered to appropriate ethical standards. As the proposed participants in the research were OU students, the website information indicated Student Research Project Panel (SRPP) approval might be needed. A follow-up telephone call to SRPP, and subsequent investigation by them, established that as the childminders would form a self-selected group, there were no rules against posting a request for participants in my research onto module/programme forums, as long as the module Chairs gave their approval (Appendix 12).

Informed consent

It was essential to ensure that childminders did not feel coerced to take part and that they had sufficient information about me, the research, and my reasons for undertaking the research to make an informed decision, They also needed an

awareness of our respective expectations and be reassured they had the right to withdraw consent (Denscombe, 2007:145).

During the informal initial verbal discussion (see 'recruitment of participants') an informal 'contract' was drawn up outlining the 'agreement by which both informant and researcher were bound' (Burgess et al, 2006:37). Each childminder was reminded of the contract at the start of the recorded interview and given a further opportunity to withdraw, if they wanted to.

To avoid distorting responses to questions if respondents are too aware of the theories being tested, they were given only basic information before data were collected (Appendix 11). I wanted the childminders' considered replies, rather than their immediate reactions, so felt it important that participants had an understanding of the relevance of certain questions for them to provide focused, informed responses. More detailed information was offered to any childminders who requested it, after the data collection process was complete (de Vaus, 2001:85).

Confidentiality and anonymity

All information shared with me by childminders has been treated as confidential. When transcribing the interviews childminders were assigned a letter in order to anonymise their responses. The key linking the letter with the real names has been kept in a paper-based file. This means that data stored on my computer is confidential, and comments used within my thesis do not identify any individuals taking part in the research.

I was mindful of the fact that some of the childminders knew each other, either within their childminding or student role. Therefore, although I referred to comments made by others within some interviews, particularly in relation to the use of e-communication, at no point were any real names used within discussion as this would have constituted a breach of confidence.

The childminders were drawn from three cohorts of students on three different modules. As a result, although a profile of childminders involved in the research has been included within this thesis (Appendix 5) to provide a context for the data analysis, it should not be possible for the childminders to be identified by anyone other than, potentially, themselves.

As my research indirectly involved children, there were certain limitations to confidentiality (Denscombe, 2002:180) that needed to be taken into account. The 'Every Child Matters' agenda (DfES, 2003) sets out the expectation of a 'duty of care' towards children and I was aware that if any childminder had disclosed information relating to the safety of a child I would have had a responsibility to address such concerns. However, as my research was not directly focusing on any safeguarding issues, and as childminders have the same legal duty, disclosure was not an issue specifically discussed with childminders before gathering data. On only one occasion was it necessary to interject into a response given to a question around what was reflected on and remind a childminder of our respective 'duty of care'. This was mentioned within the interview when E started to tell me about a fellow childminder's practice. It was revisited at the end of the interview to satisfy myself that no action was needed.

Power

Over the past 10-15 years I have become increasingly removed from working as a practitioner in the field, as can be seen from my positions on the insider/outsider researcher continuum (Appendix 9), and have taken on a more hierarchical role with an inherent power imbalance (Wenger, 2010). The relationship between myself, as a tutor and forum moderator and the childminder, as a student had the potential to be problematic (see 'recruitment of participants').

Ethically it was essential I was transparent about my role (Denscombe, 2002:178) at the time of collecting the data. However, to encourage the childminders to feel at ease and discuss their natural practice without potentially trying to focus on giving answers they felt would 'please' a tutor I deliberately stressed my background as a childminder. My previous experiences as a tutor suggested that being seen as an ex-childminder enabled me to be accepted as an equal, eliminating, or at least reducing significantly, the power issue, because I was seen as understanding their perspective. Revealing my background could, however, have altered the childminder's responses, impacting on the validity of the data collected (see 'methodological issues').

To keep the research process friendly and informal, and to aid the ideal of equality between the researcher and the interviewee by giving something back, the childminders were offered the opportunity to use any of the data generated from their input into the research to demonstrate reflection on aspects of their practice within their portfolio of evidence (PEF). I was aware there was the potential for a childminder to attempt to abuse the tutor/student relationship by expecting

preferential treatment, for example, when marking their assignments. Discussion prior to the research and the use of the informal contract pre-empted this possibility.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

In considering the credibility of my research I have summarized what I consider to be the key issues in relation to the following criteria: objectivity, reliability, validity and generalisability (Denscombe, 2007:296) in respect of the research methodology and design.

Objectivity

I considered it important to stress my insider background (Appendix 9) as a way of establishing a rapport (Oppenheim, 1992, cited in Cohen et al, 2000:122) with the childminders taking part in the research and increasing my 'street credibility' (Robson, 2002:382) as a researcher who would put across their views sensitively and accurately. However, it was essential to ensure that we did not get into a 'cosy discussion' whereby there was a loss of objectivity due to my responses within the discussion giving away my own perspective and potentially influencing the childminders' responses. Where this did happen whilst honing my interview skills, it was taken into account at the data analysis stage.

Generalisability

Cases within this study were chosen to accentuate variables (see Chapter 3), and so there has been no attempt to generalize from the individual cases contributing to this study. However, background information on the childminders taking part

offers the opportunity for others to consider the 'transference and applicability of the findings' (Denscombe, 2007:299) to their particular situation

Reliability

A reflexive account of the decisions taken at each stage of the research process have been included in this thesis to enable the reader to ascertain the reliability of the research. In addition all interview records have been retained in a file on my computer, and a marked up extract from an interview included within the appendices to illustrate the data analysis process. This provides evidence of the existence of an 'audit trail' (Denscombe, 2007:298) available for checking information if required.

Validity

Validity within a qualitative study can be difficult to demonstrate. The following information aims to show that steps were taken to ensure the data is 'reasonably likely to be accurate' (Denscome, 2007:297). It is, however, recognized that further research is necessary to validate the research findings as a whole due to the data collection methods used allowing the participants to discuss their reflective practice but offering few, if any, opportunities for the researcher to validate what was said.

I was mindful not to press for a specific viewpoint (Wilson, 1996) by asking a leading question such as 'Do you feel it would be beneficial to use the FirstClass conferences to reflect with others?', and so compromise impartiality. In carrying out the research it is possible that, in trying to build up a rapport, I inadvertently

gave away my views or the response that I was hoping for, perhaps through my voice tone (Bell, 1993:96). Where I felt that the data had been corrupted within the interview, the childminder's responses to these questions were not used for the data analysis.

Respondent validation (Measor and Woods, 1991:71) offered the opportunity to ascertain the accuracy of the interview transcription and my interpretation of the childminders' views.

However, it was important to recognise that the answers the childminders gave may not have been the same answers they would have given at a different point in time. In making a decision I considered the inherent difficulty for the childminders in remembering what they felt they had wanted to say at the time. Equally I considered it important to retain ownership of the material and the use of respondent validation incurred the danger of a childminder requesting the withdrawal of material deemed essential to my research argument.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an account of how participants were recruited to the research. It outlines the participants' profiles against the typical childminder profile (NCMA, 2008) and indicates the relevance of this information to the research. The participant profile and the account of the data collection and analysis methods have allowed for transparency within the research. An account of the ethical and methodological issues show how both these have been addressed and allow the reader to assess the credibility of the research.

In the following chapter the research data has been analysed and used to debate the research questions and indicate any findings.

Chapter 5 Findings and discussion

This chapter focuses on the knowledge that has been generated as a result of my analysis of the questionnaire and interview data and a consideration of how this compares with the literature. The chapter has been organized bearing in mind the research questions, and the key themes emerging from the data in respect of these.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Within each overarching section, where childminders were asked to provide an answer on a scale within the questionnaire the results have been presented in graphic form, to give a visual representation of the data, making it easier for the reader to identify relationships within the data (Opie, 2004:142). In deciding what format to use consideration was given to the purpose of inclusion, clarity and the opportunity for misreading the information. A consistent style of bar chart was chosen for ease of interpretation. This statistical information has been used as a starting point for discussion, with the childminders' written reasons for their choices made in the questionnaires and the interview transcripts offering the opportunity to explore the underlying reasons for the data.

Having outlined how the data has been presented, the rest of this chapter will discuss the data in relation to the research questions, identifying themes emerging from the analysis. The starting point for this discussion is the childminders' understanding of reflection.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REFLECT ON PRACTICE

The first question childminders were asked during the interview was 'What do you understand by the term reflective practice?' The intention of this question was to ensure that we were on the same wavelength and had a common understanding of reflection. However, in addition to this, the childminders' responses, offered an insight into what it meant to them to reflect within a childminding context, and provided some possibilities for the reasons – conscious or not – for the choices made.

With the emphasis within the OU FDEY on becoming a reflective practitioner it is, perhaps, unsurprising that out of the ten childminders interviewed, half gave responses that used key words (*italicized*) defining reflection and the reflective process within study material. Irrespective of the fact that the childminders knew I was a tutor, their responses suggested that study played a part in introducing them to the idea of reflection as a conscious process.

Look at what you are doing, analyse it , reflect back what you
have learned from it and move forward to the next stage **(F)**

Some common phrases emerged when defining reflection. These were 'looking back on what I have done'; 'analyzing what I do' and 'thinking about'. These suggest that reflection is seen as based on experience (Kolb, 1984), and something carried out after the event, as in Schön's (1983) 'reflection-on-action'. 'Analysing' implies some depth to the reflection, although 'thinking' can be done at several different levels (van Manen, 1977), from 'thinking about what it was about an activity' **(G)** to more systematic 'thinking required to write TMAs' **(H)**.

With only one exception **(C)** the childminders referred to reflection as something that enabled change or improvement to practice, not as something that enabled recognition of what they were doing well.

Um ... thinking about how things could be changed,
improved, or whatever **(B)**

Looking at what you do and how you do it and work out if it is
the best way to carry on doing it **(C)**

Again this may have been because the childminders were all students studying modules that directed them to identify changes to their practice (however small) as a result of engaging with reflective tools, such as the Reflective Practice cycle. Attitude towards their own practice may also have played a part. **(C)** was the only childminder to comment that she saw herself as 'a cut above them [other childminders]' and that she reflected 'in quite a selfish way, for myself – and the children are getting the happy by-product'

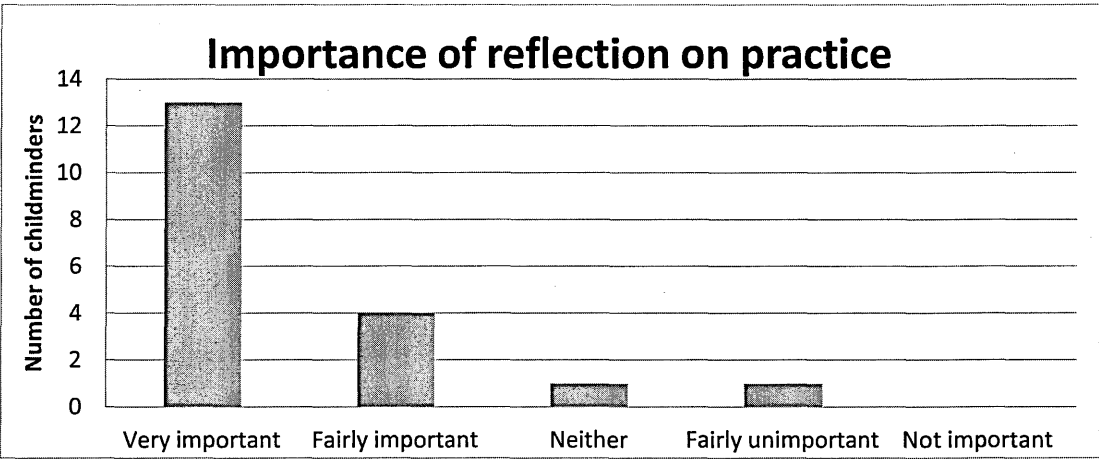
How the childminders viewed the purpose of reflective practice and what they reflected on emerged as key factors impacting on the methods used to reflect and with whom the childminders reflected. These provide a starting point for considering how a childminder doing distance-learning study, engages in reflection with others and becomes a reflective practitioner.

DEVELOPMENT OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICES

In order to engage in reflection there needs to be an understanding of the value of reflection, and a willingness to reflect (Bain et al, 1999). Six childminders stated they were already engaging in reflection before undertaking study, but all indicated that study had impacted on how they reflected

I don't feel the frequency has changed but the way I reflect has improved since starting the course. (I)

Figure 11 Responses to Q7 reflective practice questionnaire (Appendix 7)



Seventeen of the nineteen childminders felt that reflection was either very important or fairly important. As they are all studying on a Foundation Degree where reflecting on their practice is a key aspect the high percentage stressing its importance is not, perhaps, surprising. Their reasons for reflecting, however, had some differences, falling into either focusing on their childminding practice or on their own professional development.

By reflecting I am constantly reviewing and improving my practice which benefits the children in the setting. **(B)**

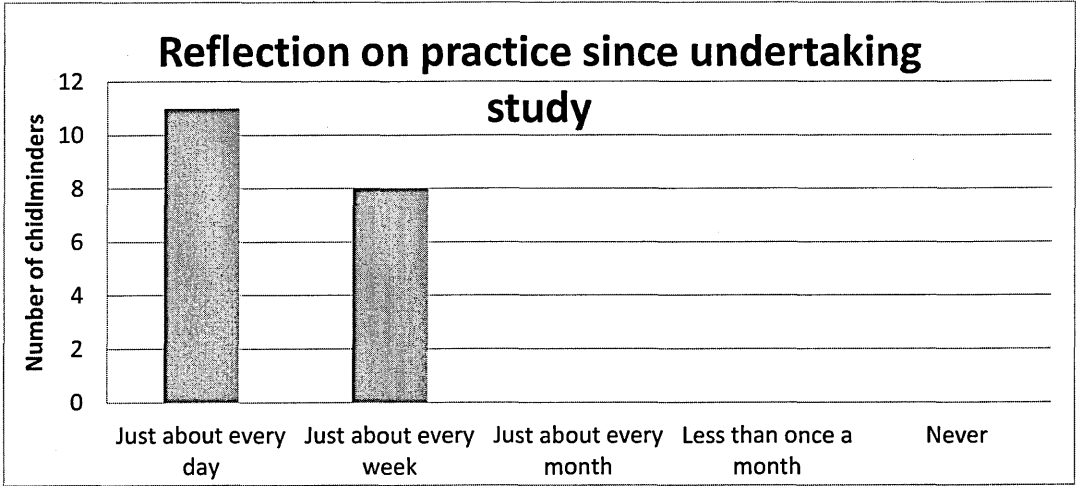
Prevents one from becoming stagnant and bored, and provides better care for children. I strive to be good at whatever I do. **(E)**

There was only one exception to combining the focus on professional development, alongside improving their everyday practice. Maybe this childminder was more honest than some others. However, she made an interesting point that as self-employed practitioners, whether childminders reflect or not, is up to them. There are few sanctions for not reflecting on practice, from inspection bodies or those using the service provided and, therefore, to do so requires a personal commitment.

The benefits are largely for myself, rather than the clients.

My business will run perfectly well if I simply maintain my current level of service, rather than improve it constantly. **(C)**

Figure 12 Responses to Q6a reflective practice questionnaire (Appendix 7)



Study had an impact on frequency of reflection, with thirteen out of the nineteen childminders noting they reflected more since undertaking study. Of the six who did not consider study had impacted on frequency, all were already reflecting on their practice. However, one had not realized this is what she was doing

I've always tried to be aware about what/why I am doing things – but not linked it to being 'reflective' until I studied with the OU. (R)

and, for others, the way in which they reflected on their practice had changed.

My reflections on my practice are more 'formal' or academic now. Previously my reflections were just informal thoughts or actions based on my experiences. (G)

Generally respondents felt that study had resulted in them putting more thought into why they did particular things, improved observation and assessment of their

practice and the children's learning and more regular reflection. What study had done for them was to develop reflection into a conscious process, supporting Dewey's definition, as cited by Evans (1999:57), of reflection as 'active, persistent and [involving] careful consideration'.

All respondents saw reflection on their practice to be vital to improving their practice and ensuring that they offered the best possible service to both parents and children. Despite this apparent commitment to reflection, the issue of time for reflection consistently came up as reason why childminders find it difficult to fit conscious reflection into their day. Some childminders taking part in the study, however, were prepared to spend personal time reflecting (see Appendix 6), with **H** recognizing that this far exceeded any requirement to do so.

What I'm doing is way above what needs to be done...I'm spending more and more time in the evenings, which I wouldn't have done before...The work we did on E215 on the UNCRC...I really engaged with it and took it to the next level. I see part of my reflective practitioning (*sic*) as an equity point of view, as moving things out of my setting and into the wider forum. (**H**)

Knowledge of the stage the childminders were in their studies suggested that this commitment to reflecting more deeply on issues relating to practice was more prevalent in (although not exclusive to) the childminders nearing the end of the FDEY. It seems that study had given them the theoretical knowledge to inform their reflection, gain more from it and, in some cases, take on a leadership role

reflecting with others on elements of their practice. This shows a shift in their perceptions of themselves and the interview data suggests that this awareness is instrumental in enabling boundary crossing (Wenger, 2010) and feeling a sense of 'being a professional' and belonging within the childcare profession (see Appendix 6).

All respondents were studying at the point of interview, making it difficult to comment on the permanency of these changes to reflective practice post-study. Nevertheless an indication that reflecting on practice, once established, is irreversible came through in the interviews, with comments such as 'I don't think I could stop reflecting now' (F) and 'I hate you really... you've messed with my brain' (E). However, whether or not the depth of reflection would stay was mooted by some.

The more formal stuff might take second place, but the everyday sort of reflecting...to be honest...it does become second nature after a while' (A)

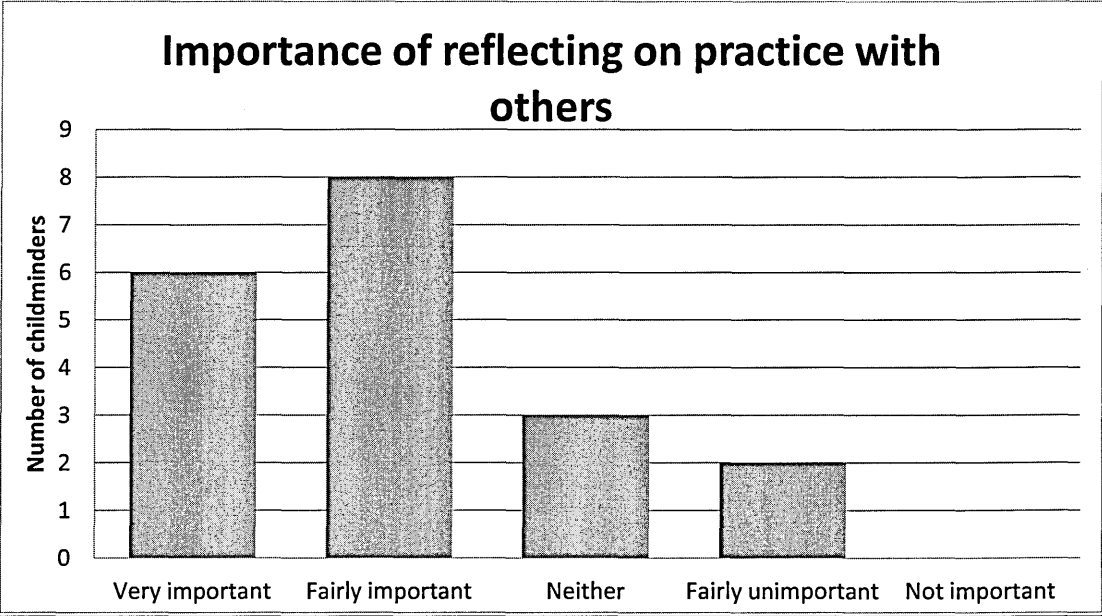
I will be reflecting...whether or not I will be reflecting academically or deeply enough is a different thing... (E)

REFLECTION WITH OTHERS

The majority of respondents considered reflecting on practice with others to be important, at least for some elements of practice. None of the childminders felt it was not at all important, although there was recognition that they work alone and so 'have to be able to reflect on (*sic*) myself' (A) and that their practice is 'unique

to them and based on their own values and beliefs, which could render input from others as less useful' (G).

Figure 13 Responses to Q8 reflective practice questionnaire
(Appendix 7)



Questionnaire responses clearly indicated that reflection with others can be a way of stimulating ideas and gaining a different perspective on practice.

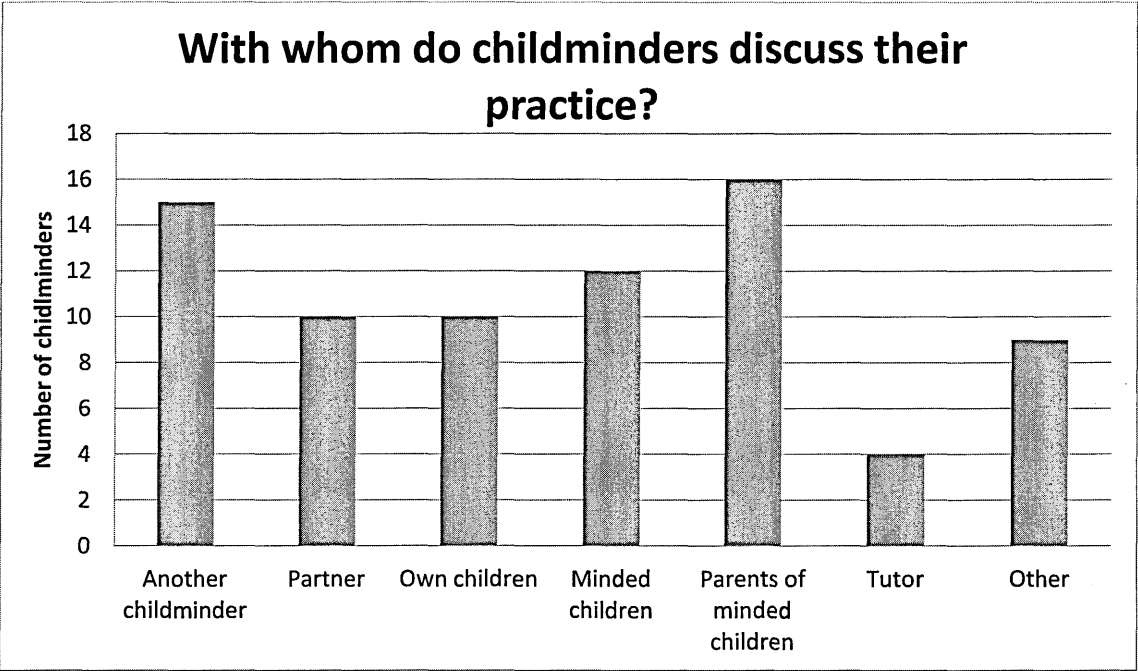
Gives a different viewpoint talking to others, particularly with people working in different settings. I'm not too proud to copy what works for others! (E)

The four childminders who belonged to a Childminding Network may have seen reflection with others as more important because they had become used to regular discussions instigated by their Network Co-ordinator framing reflection. This may have led them to seeing reflection as something you do with another person. The regularity and focus of the reflection on developing practice may also have led

them to accept reflection with others as essential to their professional development.

So we sit down and she goes through what are you doing differently, what's improved, what's different, what training are you going through. So I talk that through with her and she will advise me... (C)

Figure 14 Responses to Q9 reflective practice questionnaire (Appendix 7)



Note: The columns do not add up to 19 as childminders were asked to tick **all** that applied. This Figure shows how many childminders ticked each box

Figure 14 indicates that the childminders reflected with a wide range of people. Reflecting with another childminder or the parents of minded children were cited by most respondents. The three childminders who did not reflect with other childminders all had other people who witnessed their practice to discuss issues

with – one had a daughter who was a trained nursery teacher, another lived with her parents, and the other had built up a close relationship with their Network Co-ordinator.

Analysis of what they discussed suggested that day-to-day practice accounted for the major part of their reflection, and every childminder had someone who had knowledge of their childminding practice, or childminding practice in general, they could discuss the nitty-gritty of the day with. Most commonly, the childminders used family members, other childminders and the minded children and their parents to fulfil this role. Confidential issues and those requiring professional knowledge such as safeguarding concerns were, without exception, discussed with other professionals outside of their childminding setting, such as a Network Co-ordinator or Health Visitor. My own students indicated they reflected with their tutor. H's comment that she had 'become irritated by the lack of understanding of her perspective' from her tutor suggests that my childminding background may have opened up the opportunity for my own students to use their tutor for reflection.

The childminders did not always seem to make a conscious decision over whom to reflect with, particularly when engaging in everyday thinking (van Manen, 1977) around, for example, the care needs or experiences offered to the children. Rather they interacted with whoever was around at the point of reflection. This 'low level' reflection-in-action was not new to the childminders as they all noted that this was something that they had done before embarking on study.

Before and during activities – I discuss things all the time.

For example, I ask the children which activities they would like. (Q)

During and at the end of an activity as it is then possible to adapt the activity as it takes place. (P)

Writing up the daily diaries for parents, giving them information about their child's day, was cited by six of the childminders as a time when they engaged in reflection. However, this task was carried out during the working day and had a prime aim of informing parents. In addition it offered little opportunity for in-depth reflection due to time constraints.

The childminders' responses suggest that this thinking about the effectiveness of everyday practice or how to deal with common issues such as toilet training does not involve academic input. Instead it involves practice experience and what several of the childminders referred to as 'commonsense'. By the nature of those the childminders were engaging with, there was limited opportunity within these regular exchanges to make links to theoretical ideas or discuss practice in depth. Parents, as service users, tend to be interested in what their child did, but not 'how' or 'why' they did it.

[Reflection] is only really for my benefit...the parents are not really that bothered....mostly they just ask 'did he play nicely' ok, right let's go' and that's it. (A)

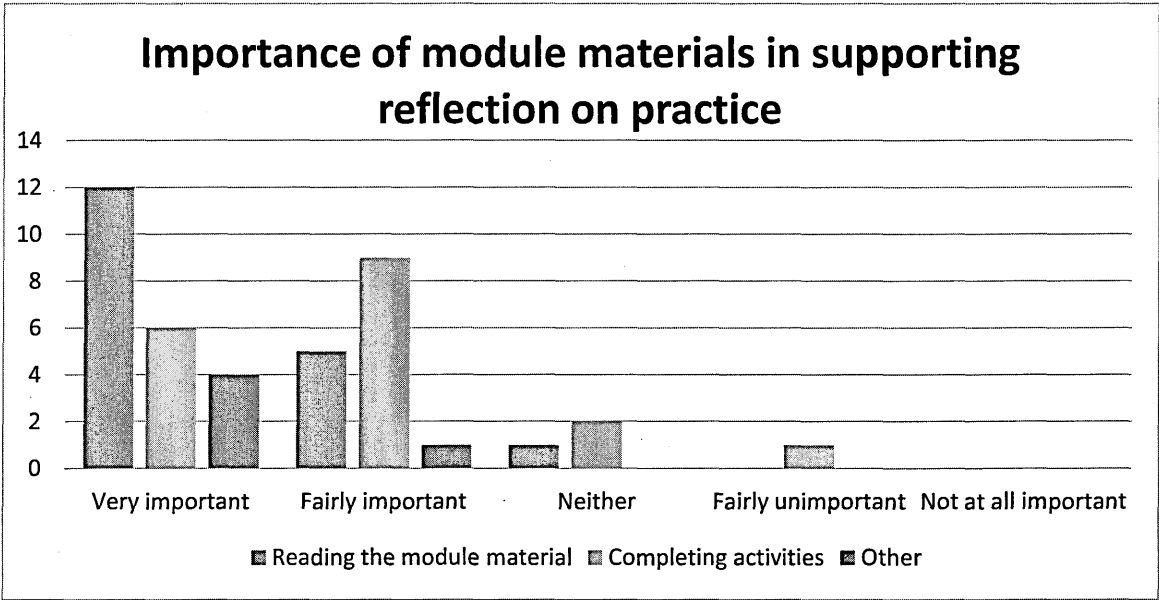
Although the writing of the diaries and discussion with parents or children was noted by the childminders as an opportunity for reflection, van Manen's (1977) third level of systematic reflection with the aim of theoretical understandings and critical insights appeared to be carried out outside of the childminding day. Planned for time for reflection often made use of tangible evidence of practice and offered the opportunity for the development of practice that could be justified or backed up.

The daily diaries...I do a duplicate copy and I use them when I am writing up the children's reports..because I have written it down as I reflected during the day so when I go back to it, it is much more meaningful. (D).

THE IMPACT OF STUDY ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Few of the childminders were self-directed in engaging with systematic reflection on practice (van Manen (1977)). Most indicated they reflected at this level because they were required to as part of their study. For those studying the two work-based modules – E115 and E215 – the module material contained explanatory text and practical examples on using the reflective tools (Appendix 4) and researching practice using the Mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2001); the activities were an integral part of the teaching materials. It was, therefore, little surprise that the childminders considered the module materials important in supporting reflection and the completing of activities and note taking as only marginally less important than reading the module materials. Five childminders had separately noted specific aspects of the materials – forum activities and the audio visual material - under 'other'.

Figure 15 Responses to Q15 reflective practice questionnaire (Appendix 7)



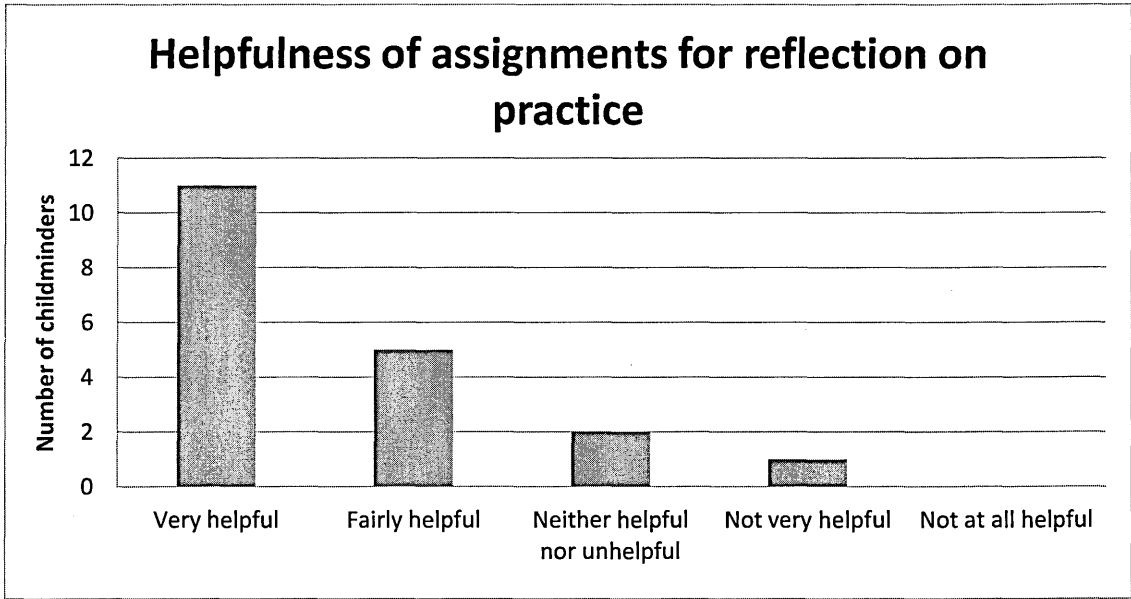
Note: The columns do not add up to 19 as not all childminders provided a full response to this question.

Typical responses when asked for their own views on the impact study had had on their reflective practices suggested that study had raised awareness of reflection on practice as part of their role.

I am not sure it would have occurred to me...in a ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’ kind of way (C)

The questionnaire responses indicated that assignments were seen as very helpful for reflection on practice.

Figure 16 Responses to Q16 reflective practice questionnaire (Appendix 7)



Analysis of the interviews identified that for most of the childminders the depth of reflection, and use of theoretical ideas to inform their reflection, was largely reserved for the assignments. Their day-to-day reflection-in-action continued to be less in-depth.

Well, when you are doing assignments you have got to link it back to what you have read. And then day-to-day you just work at a lower level...for practical reasons. (F)

It is questionable, however, whether assignments had any impact on becoming a reflective practitioner. Although the format of the assignments required the childminders to carry out investigations into their practice and then reflect on their findings using the reflective tools the fact that they were assessed seemed to get in the way. There was a sense that they were sometimes artificial and not about issues pertinent to the childminders' 'real' practice. The childminders seemed to

see the assessment and day-to-day practice as divorced from each other, and whether they applied the skills used to reflect about practice in the assignments to actual practice was not discussed. This is an area for further research.

I don't know that they do [make me reflect]. I would not necessarily pick what they are asking us to think about to reflect on...I find myself looking for an activity that looks impressive...something you are going to say 'Wow, what a fantastic activity'!...Also it is human nature to pick something you have done well for the assignment, rather than something that has gone wrong. (G)

Study brought the childminders into contact with a tutor who could be seen as a 'more knowledgeable other' (Mariage et al, 2000). Whether or not the childminders chose to reflect with their tutor (discussed under the section 'reflection with others'), the feedback from the tutor on assignments is intended to facilitate reflection on practice. Comments on the student's script may include questions that model critical thinking (Brookfield, cited in Johanson, 2010) or take a critical peer perspective (Evans, 1999). The value or otherwise of assignment feedback to reflection on practice was not mentioned by any of the childminders. It is not possible to draw any conclusions from this omission without further research, but it may be that any beneficial role the tutor may have had was absorbed unconsciously into the childminders' practice.

The childminders instigating their own reflection on aspects of early years practice, such as how they shared information with parents, were those studying the final

module in the FDEY. This suggests that study and the engagement with others as part of this does provide the impetus needed to engage the childminders in reflective activity. It also suggests that study can offer the challenge necessary to effect transformational learning and move the childminders towards becoming reflective practitioners and developing a professional identity. Email exchange with one childminder **(E)** illuminated how having had her awareness raised through study, of reflective practice and of what she should be doing and how to do it, as well as noting the impact reflection was having on her practice was a powerful motivator to continue to reflect on practice.

Using the 3 layer model has helped me to identify quite a few things about my personal practice that I didn't even realise were motivators for me, and this in turn has allowed me to make very positive changes in my attitude and practice. I like the RPC and have used its format and the evidence generated, to inform some changes... one example... how I settle children in when they first come to me. **(E)**

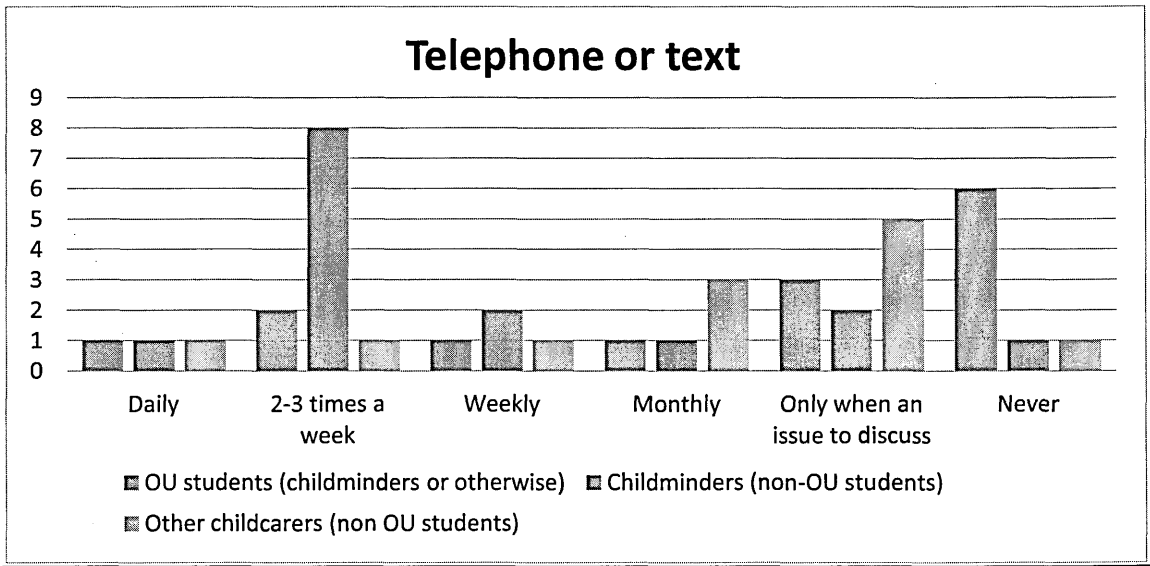
As part of their studies the childminders were directed to gather evidence of practice and move beyond working from a practical awareness of what they do and why, to using evidence to support the thinking about their practice from a theoretical perspective. Study gave them the theory to be able to more fully understand their practice, as well as the tools to engage in reflective practice. However, findings indicated that deeper reflection was harder, if not impossible, to do without input from others. Even the childminder **(G)** who considered that her deep level reflection was solo reflection, commented that there had to be a degree

of ‘feeding off others’ for the reflection to be effective (Appendix 6). However, as already noted those readily available to the childminders knew about their day to day practice but may not have the academic knowledge to challenge thinking needed for transformative reflection. This meant that the childminders needed to engage with others who were not necessarily closely involved with their practice.

HOW THE CHILDMINDERS REFLECTED ON THEIR PRACTICE

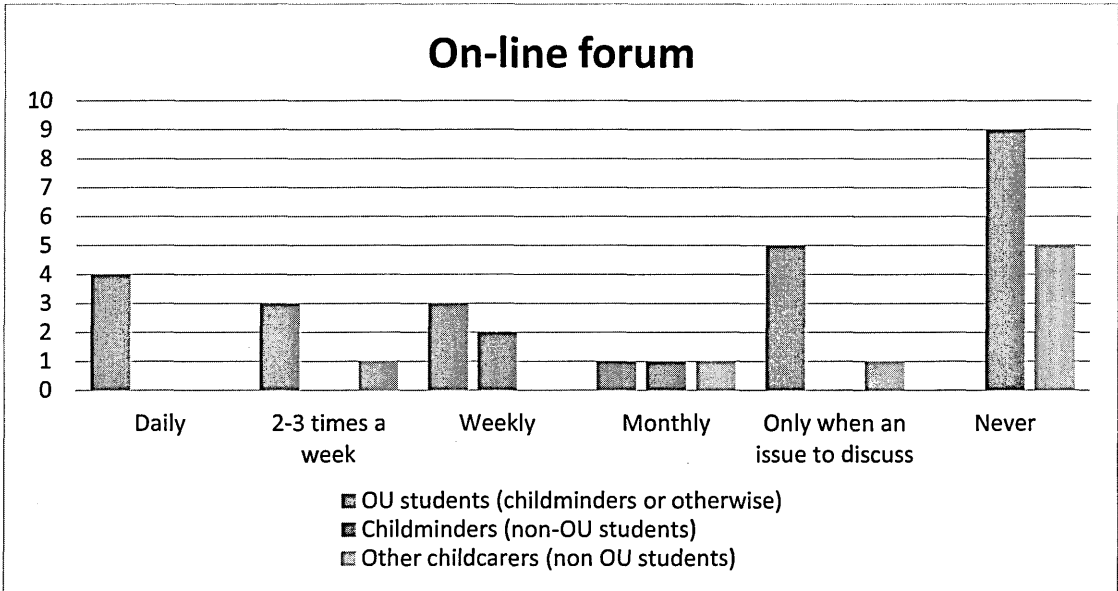
The childminders used a range of ways to discuss their practice with others, from asynchronous options, such as forums, email and letters or notes, to synchronous contact via telephone or face-to-face. Figures 17 - 21 indicate that most of the childminders had face-to-face contact and/or telephone contact with other childminders and childcarers within a week. Online forums were little used outside of study but, alongside email, were the most frequent modes of communication with other students studying by distance-learning.

Figure 17 Responses to Q11a reflective practice questionnaire –contact by telephone or text (Appendix 7)



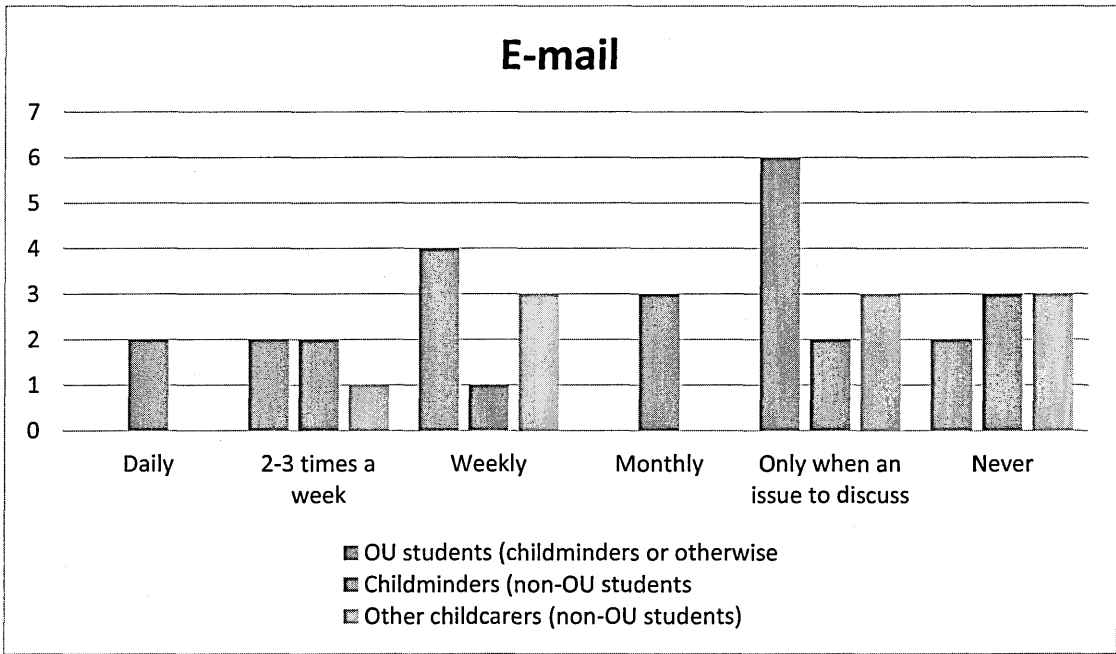
Note: The columns do not necessarily add up to 19 as childminders were asked to tick all that applied. This chart shows how many childminders ticked each box

Figure 18 Responses to Q11a reflective practice questionnaire –contact by on-line forum (Appendix 7)



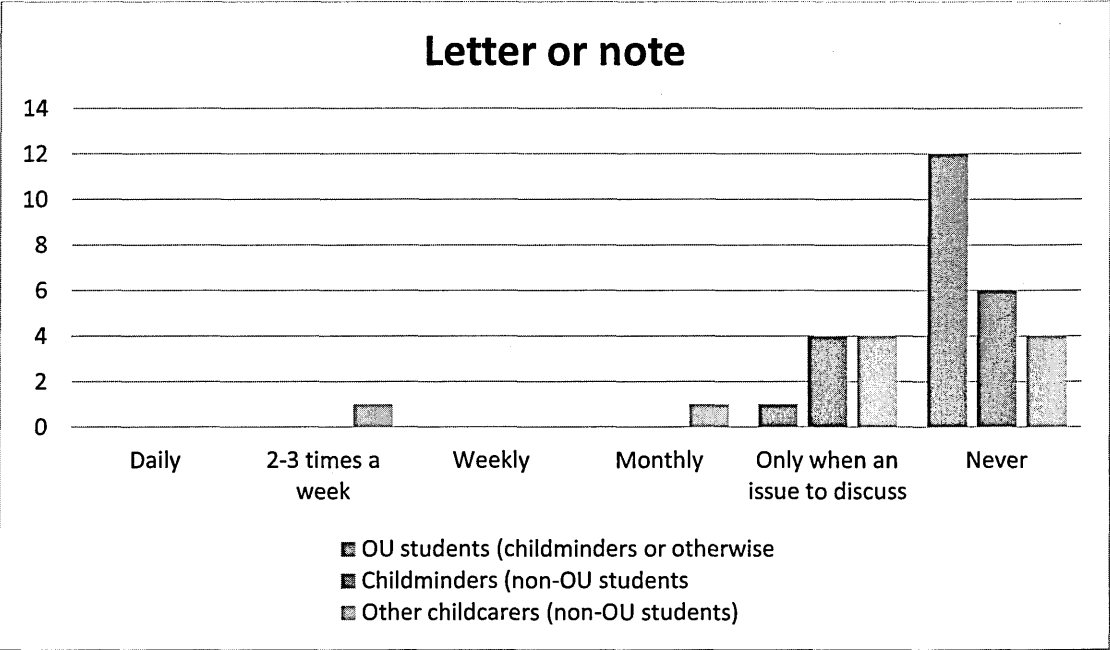
Note: The columns do not necessarily add up to 19 as childminders were asked to tick all that applied. This chart shows how many childminders ticked each box

Figure 19 Responses to Q11a reflective practice questionnaire – e-mail contact (Appendix 7)



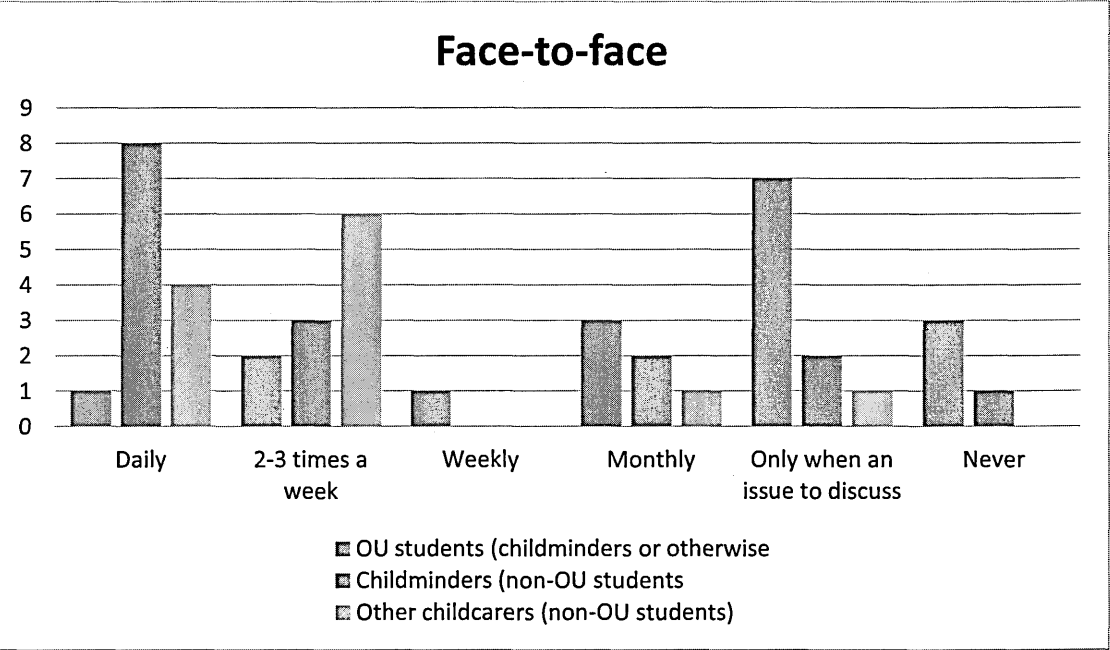
Note: The columns do not necessarily add up to 19 as childminders were asked to tick all that applied. This chart shows how many childminders ticked each box

Figure 20 Responses to Q11a reflective practice questionnaire –contact by letter or note (Appendix 7)



Note: The columns do not necessarily add up to 19 as childminders were asked to tick all that applied. This chart shows how many childminders ticked each box

Figure 21 Responses to Q11a reflective practice questionnaire –face-to-face contact (Appendix 7)



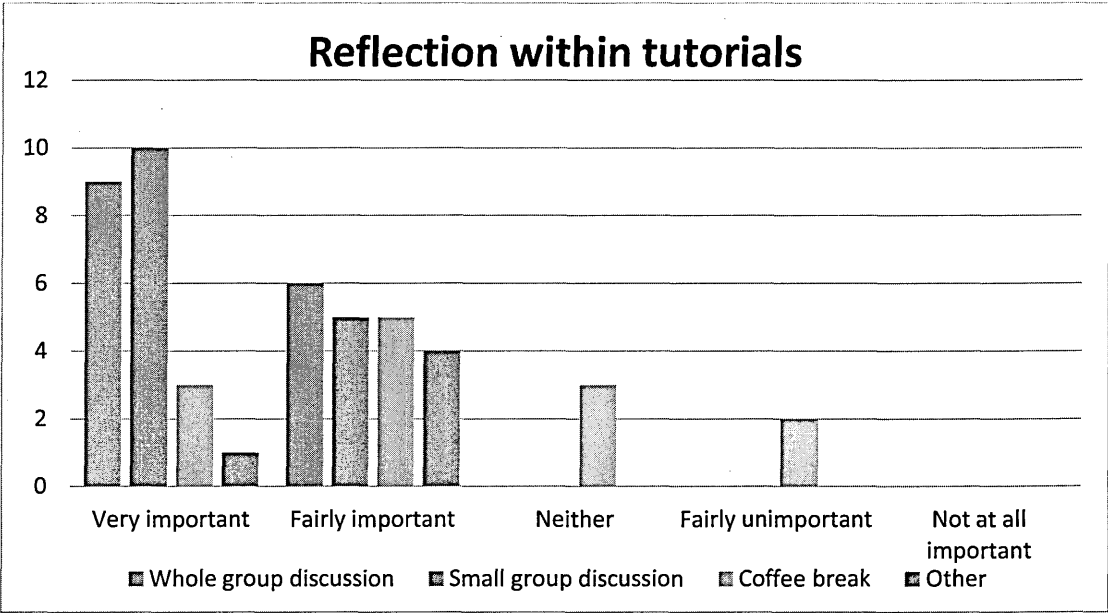
Note: The columns do not necessarily add up to 19 as childminders were asked to tick all that applied. This chart shows how many childminders ticked each box

Face-to-face contact was seen by the childminders as the preferred method of communication as it is easier and more immediate. It was also considered to be more personal and gave added clues as part of the communication.

Face-to-face contact is more insightful [and you can] gauge
body language... less open to misunderstanding or
misinterpretation. **(R)**

Studying by distance learning meant that the only times the childminders met face-to-face with their fellow students was at tutorials. Tutorials gave between three and six opportunities to come together; a frequency of once every six to twelve weeks, depending on the tutorial pattern for the module. Fifteen of the nineteen childminders attended the tutorials that were part of their study. The various elements of tutorials gave the opportunity to engage in discussion and debate on broader issues of practice related to theoretical ideas within the module materials. Not only were the tutor-directed whole-group and small-group discussions seen as important, but the informal opportunities, such as coffee breaks, to interact with others were also seen as opportunities to get to know people so they felt more at ease when reflecting with them in other arenas, such as the on-line forums (Figure 22).

Figure 22 Responses to Q14 reflective practice questionnaire (Appendix 7)



Note: The columns do not add up to 19 as only childminders who attended tutorials were asked to complete this question. In addition, not all childminders provided a response to each element of the tutorial. This chart shows how many childminders circled a particular point on the scale for each element of the tutorial.

For some participants, tutorials were a stimulating experience that raised awareness of the benefits of reflecting with others.

I did E243, which is Inclusion.....and I was able to go to the tutorials and I found that hugely beneficial because there was a lady who was working with children with special needs and her views blew my mind. I did go along with the idea that 'I know what I think'.....and without that lady's input I wouldn't have thought of it in the way she made me think of it... (C)

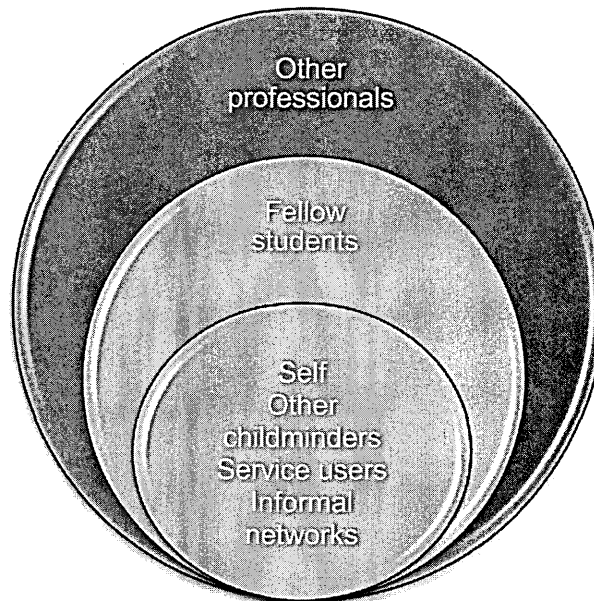
For other childminders, the benefits of attending a tutorial situated a 3-hour drive away, had to be weighed up against the time taken out of available study time.

This illustrates the challenges for childminders doing distance-learning in engaging with reflection with others and leads onto some of the factors childminders took into account and the compromises they had to make in deciding how to engage in reflection and who to reflect with.

FACTORS INFLUENCING CHOICE OF REFLECTIVE PARTNERS

At the start of the FDEY the childminders needed more / or equally knowledgeable practitioners to reflect with to undertake course activities. As has already been noted, pre-study the majority of the childminders primarily reflected with other childminders or service users. As they progressed through the foundation degree the interviews indicated they increasingly engaged with their fellow students to reflect more deeply on their practice and ultimately transformed their view of themselves to reflect with other professionals. (Figure 23). This professional journey was not without its challenges for the childminders and they were faced with decisions, whether conscious or otherwise, to make in finding people to support the process of becoming a reflective practitioner.

Figure 23 Reflective partners the childminders built up as they progressed through the FDEY



Comments by the childminders indicated that other childminders would be their first choice of reflective partner. **(A)** was not the only childminder to say that she would choose to reflect with another childminder, with *her* reasoning being that they would understand her practice and she wouldn't have to explain herself. Making use of these existing social support networks and engaging with childminders they trusted (Stevens et al, 2007) allowed for discussions around practice that were easier because the other person knew their practice and so less explanation of context was needed. They did, however, seem to recognize that these pre-existing social support networks were not meeting their changing needs or thinking and there were childminders with whom the respondents did not reflect with. In some cases this was because they recognized they were 'no longer on the same wavelength' **(H)** and sometimes it was because they looked down on them.

I think that I am viewing them as an outsider might view them
– as housewives who have others' children in their own
home **(C)**

One childminder **(A)** did not reflect with other childminders within her childminding group because she felt that the other childminders might think she was a 'know-it-all' if she mentioned a theorist as part of a discussion about practice.

This disassociation with childminders who were not engaged in study left a hole in their support networks. This was particularly true for those childminders who had taken an active part in their local childminding community and had met regularly with other childminders at a childminder drop-in but found they were no longer at the same level of consciousness. **(H)** gave the following example of why she could no longer meet up at her local group.

...they had a meeting and decided not to offer messy play
because it would take too long to clear up!! If they can't
clear up with a room full of about thirty people, how on earth
are they going to offer it in their own home? ... I can't reflect
with them because I don't like their attitude. **(H)**

The changes to the childminders' professional identity seemed to be responsible for destroying the trust and reciprocity (Stevens et al, 2007) the childminders had had with other childminders. By changing their professional identity the childminders no longer fully belonged to the same 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998).

The childminders had identified the need to reflect with someone who understood their practice but relationships with others outside childminding equally seemed to be hampered by the childminders' views of their own professional identity. Despite **(A)**'s feeling that she was not the same as other childminders because she had some understanding of theoretical ideas, when asked if she would reflect with another childcarer, her response was 'No'.

Ummm, no... because I am only a childminder and I am a second-class citizen in the childcare world. **(A)**

Others also noted that the attitudes and willingness of other professionals to engage in reflection with a childminder was a factor influencing whom they reflected with. Other professionals did not consider childminders to be part of their 'community of practice', and, as a result, did not seem to credit them with the knowledge to reflect on practice. **(B)** discussed the barriers she encountered in building a relationship involving reciprocity (Stevens et al, 2007) with the nursery teacher, in the setting she took the minded children to.

I wouldn't have let it be known that I needed to know...and, also...she [nursery teacher] didn't always come across. This is not the first child I have taken there, but she didn't talk to me before I did this training... it is a two-way thing. I needed to gain confidence and she needed to ...you, know...see me as another professional. **(B)**

All the childminders were experienced childcarers, with a wealth of practical knowledge but it was the addition of theoretical knowledge and understanding through undertaking professional qualifications, such as the FDEY, that seemed to offer the opportunity for **(B)** to gain professional standing in the eyes of the nursery teacher. It is possible that the move away from qualitative language to more academic terminology as a result of study – something **(B)** noted as a change as a result of study - contributed to the change in the nursery teacher's view of the childminder's professionalism, too.

If this shift in the perception of childminders by other professionals could be achieved then there was the opportunity for reflection with professionals within the wider childcare community of practice. However, **(B)**'s experience suggests this change required the childminder to be proactive in bringing their developing knowledge and understanding of theory underpinning practice to the attention of other professionals. This involved having confidence and self-belief, something that did not seem to begin to develop in the childminders until they were nearing the end of the FDEY. One childminder **(F)** on E215 (the final module in the FDEY) mentioned that she had just put her name forward to be an elected member of her regional childcare council and others had taken on training and support roles. These developments not only opened up avenues for reflecting with other professionals, but suggest that they were making the transition to seeing themselves as professionals. That it was not easy to make this transition seemed evident within the comment by **(F)** that 'there is nothing like getting above myself'!

For the majority of the childminders professional identity was something they struggled with, making it difficult to build up the relationship necessary to feel

comfortable enough to reflect with other professionals. **(E)**'s example of how she worried about whether she was explaining herself correctly, and using the right theoretical terms when discussing a child's behavior and learning with a Portage worker also suggests that there may be an issue around how comfortable or secure they are with the professional knowledge they are acquiring through study. This seems evident by the fact that none of the childminders actively sought out other professionals to reflect with, although there were instances where this happened as part of their everyday practice, as with **(B)** and the nursery teacher.

When asked how they chose a reflective partner the childminders put forward a range of factors they used consciously when choosing someone to reflect with. These factors were often related to the reason why they were reflecting and whether the person would be able to do what was required. In addition, the person they chose was someone they already had a close relationship with, such as a family member, suggesting that they needed to feel comfortable and relaxed with the person they were reflecting with. **(H)** noted that when writing her assignments she wanted someone who would take an opposing view.

I know that in the course I have to argue my view...well...my mother qualified as a teacher in 1961...she doesn't have the same views as me...I go to her and ask her to read my TMAs because I know she will challenge me! **(H)**

For **(E)** assignment writing was also a time when she needed to find someone to reflect with, but unlike **(H)** she did not want someone to openly challenge her thinking. In the interviews **(H)** came across as a much more self-assured person

than (E), suggesting that personality may also unconsciously feed into the choice of reflective partner.

[if he says something I don't agree with] I can just tell him he is stupid! [laughter] it is just 'listen to me'!!...I'm going to tell you stuff', and then that just sorts it out in my head. He doesn't really listen to me, but that doesn't matter...(E)

Given free choice, (E) would have chosen someone who was on the same wavelength, and preferably on the same course and who she could interact with face-to-face. In the absence of anyone meeting these criteria, she chose her husband because it gave her the opportunity to challenge herself by verbalising her ideas out loud. This verbalizing of ideas is something that Knights (1985) considered to be important for reflection, although she also indicated that the full attention of the listener was needed. However for both (E) and (G) having the attention of the listener was cited as not important, or something they actively preferred the listener not to do!

It's usually my poor old husband.. not that he really listens to me... in fact I prefer it if he doesn't ... I just use him as someone to talk to, to get me thinking... (G)

Husbands or partners were cited by several childminders as people they would reflect with. The reasons given included being able to speak out loud, as with (E) and not having to worry about confidentiality. If a partner was not available then friends were mentioned as an alternative. These reasons suggest that the need to

feel comfortable with a person, alongside trust and a feeling of security (Boud and Walker, 1998) was an important consideration when deciding whom to reflect with.

The discussion so far has focused on face-to-face communication which can make the differences in role and status visible. This lays the way open for tacit knowledge of others (Eraut, 2008) to encourage prejudiced behaviour through observation and foregrounding professional identity as a factor influencing whom the childminders could and would reflect with.

As already noted in earlier sections of this chapter, the majority of reflection the childminders engaged in was driven by activities within the study material and assessment. The childminders had access to other students via course online forums, opening up opportunities to reflect with others who were academically on the same wavelength, but not necessarily childminders. Despite the potential of online communication methods to minimize tacit knowledge, overcome the barriers associated with professional identity, and allow the childminders to interact with others childcarers on an equal basis, analysis of the data identified no explicit evidence that the online environment was used by the childminders for deeper reflection with others. Neither was there any evidence that the childminders used the online environment to build up a relationship with a diverse range of people (Macdonald, 2008; Smith, 2004).

The childminders made use of the module-specific online environment for reflection with other students on module-related tasks and as a result had the opportunity to gain other perspectives on issues that could then be used to inform reflection on their own practice. Although some childminders noted the

helpfulness of this, others indicated that the lack of similarity between group-based and home-based settings impacted on how easy it was to reflect with others.

Not particularly suited to childminders..... I find it really hard to find correlations between my practice and pre-schools or nurseries... it is not much help to me to have to apply the discussion to what I do...it's just not relevant. **(K)**

The more general discussion opportunities within the tutor group forums were little used and any use of the online environment here seemed incidental – a making use of what was available – rather than a conscious choice to instigate reflection on issues of their own choice.

There are people constantly asking questions about what should I do in this situation... how should I approach this, and it makes me think about what I would do and how would I do it. **(D)**

Six of the ten childminders interviewed explicitly expressed some reluctance to use the forums, or only used them because they were directed to. These childminders used phrases such as 'maybe' or 'might' which suggested that online communication would not be a positive, or first choice, for reflecting with others.

Maybe First Class I would use for reflection...particularly with this course because we are being asked – forced – to... with some of the activities. **(C)**

There also seemed to be similar barriers of confidence to overcome, whether the interaction is face-to-face or online.

I didn't have the confidence to post up a message and
say...well, actually I don't agree with you and I think
that...(B)

One childminder indicated she enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to engage in virtual reflection. However the forums she belonged to were nationwide forums for childminders, one of which offered support for childminders undertaking OU study. By virtue of being made up of childminders (H) commented that this forum offered the opportunity to relate the theory to childminding practice and share ideas with others who understood both the study and the practice. She described how she had the laptop in the same room while she was childminding, and could respond almost instantaneously.

But it [reflecting online] works and...a lot of us are already in
an online community...and all you have got to do is put your
question up and someone will reply...because we're all so
sad *[laughter]* that we always have our laptops on all day
long...you hear the ping of a message and go off and help
someone... (H)

It seems, therefore, that for this childminder the virtual environment may be being used to replicate the support offered within a face-to-face childminder drop-in, In contrast though to the local face-to-face childminder drop-in, the online 'drop-in'

offered the opportunity to reflect with like-minded, informed childminders who had the theoretical knowledge to challenge practice but also understood childminding practice.

The forum allows childminders to get support from others who understand their perspective. We are able to offer advice and even point out the error of their ways [*laughter*] when someone is not being professional (H)

(H)'s comment here suggests that the childminders are comfortable with each other by virtue of their shared understanding. This allows for the development of strong professional relationships of mutual trust which in turn contributes to a professional identity (Eraut, 2008).

Two recurring reasons for not using the online environment for reflection were identified by the childminders. One reason centred around the communication being asynchronous. The lack of an instant response impacted on the usefulness of the online environment for reflection because otherwise 'the moment for reflection was gone' (J). The second reason brought up was that of time. Not only did the majority of the childminders have limited time available because they worked full time, but the sifting through the forum messages to find a response took time.

I just don't have the time [to use the forum in a reflective way]
and there are just so many messages! I might use it just to

get ideas from...I suppose, maybe, to see if I was thinking
along the same lines as everybody else.... (B)

As I have worked with the data to complete this chapter and address my overarching research question I have noted similarity in the childminders' responses in some respects, suggesting that the context within which they work brings with it many similar issues. However, their responses have also brought out the complexity involved in engaging in reflection with others arising from factors such as their reasons for reflecting on their practice. Some key themes emerged which suggest there is no easy answer to the challenge for a childminder doing distance-learning study of engaging in reflection with others and becoming a reflective practice.

Study raised awareness of the value in reflecting on practice. The way in which reflection happened changed, as did the frequency, with greater consciousness of reflecting on practice. A greater awareness of the changes reflection brought to practice was also identified, as was thinking about their practice. Whilst there was an indication that the childminders were more committed to reflecting on their practice as a result of study, this research did not extend to gathering data from the childminders post the FDEY. The sustainability of the changes to their reflective practice is not, therefore, something that can be commented upon. Equally, whilst study was identified as a catalyst for reflection, the role and effectiveness of the different aspects of the study experience on reflective practice need further investigation.

The findings from the study suggest that study provides the skills to enable reflection on practice, as well as the theoretical knowledge to support deeper reflection. However, the opportunities for reflection provided as part of the module, such as forum activities, face-to-face or online tutorials and access to students working in other roles within the field of childcare, were not utilized as much as I anticipated before undertaking this research. Equally I had expected that the assignments offered an opportunity for students to engage in deeper reflection on their practice. As part of the module team I have worked on developing assessment tasks for the work-based learning modules that offer the opportunity for students to choose an aspect of practice pertinent to their role and provision. It therefore surprised me how little value the childminders placed on the writing of assignments as a vehicle for reflection on practice.

The reflective activity had an impact on the level of reflection (van Manen, 1977) for childminders involved in this study. Reflection on practice took place most frequently either in-action or on-action (Schön, 1987). Only as part of their studies did the childminders engage in reflection beyond-action to consider generic childcare-related issues. The importance of this less day-to-day practice-focused activity needs further investigation, but it appeared to be a factor in developing professional identity and becoming a reflective practitioner. A minority of childminders within this study spent additional time reflecting more broadly, suggesting they were further on in the process of becoming a reflective practitioner and developing an identity as a professional, than those who mainly reflected on issues pertinent to immediate practice. The research did not uncover any definite reasons for this difference in reflection. There was some indication within the childminders' responses that personality or career aspirations may have had an

impact, but this is an area for further research. Outside of study, the childminders made use of daily activities such as writing in a home-setting diary, or work-based tasks such as the children's records as an opportunity to reflect on practice. By the nature of their intended audience – parents - these activities gave little opportunity for deep reflection.

Engaging with others was identified as important for reflection and the childminders made use of a variety of reflective partners, and methods to reflect with others. However while some methods were dictated to the childminders by way of study expectations or the opportunities open to them, the data clearly pointed to a preference for physical, rather than virtual, contact with others. The relationship between the childminder and whom they reflected with appeared to be a contributory factor in terms of what they reflected on and the depth of reflection but, at the same time the childminders often made do with whoever was around. The scope of this research does not allow for a full understanding of the importance of the relationship and the factors that impact on the building up of a relationship. However, the research data shows that the childminders gravitated towards other childminders, suggesting that familiarity and similarity of context are important, with some childminders noting the uniqueness of their childminding setting as a barrier to reflecting with other childcarers. At the same time engaging with others with a similar knowledge base and professional identity appeared important to the childminders, creating a problem for engaging in reflection with others and becoming a reflective practitioner.

The findings from this research suggested it was common for the deeper reflection engaged in by the childminders to occur in isolation. Assignment writing or

reflection on practice carried out outside of the daily practice was, most usually, executed alone. The feeding in of others to the reflective process, rather than actually reflecting with others is an area not addressed within the literature in my literature review.

The childminders constantly referred to time as an issue for reflection and this, coupled with the difficulties in accessing others to reflect with may have accounted for this way of using others to inform deeper reflection.

I had expected that opportunities to engage with ICT would have enabled the childminders to overcome many of the issues associated with distance-learning study and working in isolation. The literature review indicated that an online environment could also overcome professional development issues by removing clues to perceived identity. However, few of the childminders embraced online communication as a vehicle for communicating with others. Nor did their comments provide the reasoning behind this, beyond broad issues, such as time to make effective use of the medium and response time.

SUMMARY

This chapter has reflected on the key themes emerging from the data in relation to how the childminders engaged in reflection with others. It outlined the data analysis decisions taken early on in the research, and the thinking behind the presentation of the data within the chapter.

The sections within the chapter have been structured to debate the overarching research question 'how does a childminder doing distance-learning study, engage

in reflection with others and become a reflective practitioner'. The chapter makes extensive use of quotations to offer the opportunity for others to view the evidence informing the interpretations made by the researcher.

In the following chapter an evaluation of the research has been carried out and opportunities for further research have been identified.

Chapter 6 Evaluation

This chapter considers the positive elements of the research along with the challenges and any limitations due to methodology and research design decisions. The possibilities for further research will also be considered at the end of this chapter.

POSITIVE ELEMENTS OF THE STUDY

One of the most positive elements of the study resulted from carrying out research with childminders who were interested in the focus of the research and offered to engage in more sustained contact than was originally set out in my methodology. Three of the ten childminders interviewed have kept in touch over the two years with ongoing, informal dialogue at irregular intervals, primarily through e-mail exchanges. This has enabled me to go back to them to clarify points, explore the emerging findings in more detail and to discuss some of the developments I have considered for module design to improve opportunities for reflection with others. I see this clarification and discussion, as triangulating and, thereby, strengthening the validity of my research and increasing the viability of my suggestions for reflecting on practice. Asking childminders to go back to past responses also identified some contradictions or inconsistencies between their answers, highlighting that the childminders' responses were from a particular moment in time. The most likely explanation for the change in their responses is that the childminders were developing as reflective practitioners over the timescale of my research and, this change in both behaviour and thinking has, therefore, been acknowledged as a positive outcome for study, and incorporated into the findings, rather than a negative aspect of the research design.

In looking at the positive elements of the research, and any limitations, I have, firstly, considered how far my study correlates with aspects of Nisbet and Watt's (1984, cited in Cohen et al, 2000:184) strengths and weaknesses of a case study

- Can provide insights into similar cases
- Strong on reality
- They catch unique features
- Results may only offer a snapshot and rely on the reader seeing their application
- Prone to problems of bias despite attempts to address reflexivity

As a case study involving an opportunity sample (Cohen et al, 2000:102) of childminders, I acknowledge that the findings from this research cannot be considered to be representative of childminders as a whole (Creswell, 2003). However, there are essential characteristics of the childminding context, such as isolation and low status, impacting on engaging in reflection with others, that offer the potential for fittingness (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) or transferability of the findings to similar contexts and, in particular, other childminders engaging in distance-learning study. Through moderating Open University on-line forums I can identify many of the issues identified in data analysis chapter, such as those relating to professional identity, suggesting some degree of commonality between childminders. The use of a case study approach to explore the views of individual childminders who were all studying on The Open University distance-learning FDEY, therefore, offers an opportunity for transferability to other childminders engaging in Open University study. It is also likely, with the growth of distance-learning opportunities, that the issues for childminders are not confined to

a specific module, or programme of study, or a specific institution and, I consider that this research could, equally, be transferable to other training providers and, therefore, 'useful' (Green and Thorogood, 2004:197) within the field of education.

From my own experience as a childminder, and my involvement with childminders from a tutoring perspective, I would argue that the issues raised by the childminders participating in the research, such as how they perceive themselves, or childminding as a profession, are common to many childminders. These feelings expressed by childminders around status, are replicated in the media and in the NCMA (2009a) Membership Survey. Alongside this, the data came from exploring the childminders' actual practices and, therefore, this case study is strong on reality.

This study set out to identify how childminders engage in reflection on their practice. Each of the childminders participating in my research were individuals with their own particular set of defining characteristics, such as age, experience and previous level of study. By creating a grid of all childminders using these defining characteristics (Appendix 5) and then making an 'information-orientated selection' (Flyvbjerg, 2006:230) of childminders to take part in the interview stage of the research on the basis of similarity in some areas, and diversity in others I consider I have been successful in capturing the unique features of the individual cases within the broader case study. The broader case study had defining features of isolation on a variety of levels. I consider this has enabled the study to add to the pool of knowledge and understanding of reflective practice, while using these unique features to pose questions for future research.

In the conclusion there has been some attempt to suggest how the findings to the study could be applied. Although Nisbet and Watt (1984, cited in Cohen et al, 2000) consider generalizability to be one of the weaknesses of a case study approach, I feel my past and current roles and experiences have enabled me to understand how the results could be applied at individual, strategic and support levels. I have, therefore, been able to outline recommendations for addressing the particular difficulties for reflecting on practice encountered by childminders, for a diversity of readers. These could include the childminders themselves who are on, or intending to embark on, the FDEY; those working directly with childminders, such as the national organisation for childminders (NCMA) or childminding network co-ordinators; those involved in training involving childminders, such as module teams and tutors, among others. The application of the findings to a diverse audience is, in my view, one of the main strengths of this research.

CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

This study has been completed against a backdrop of personal and professional challenges. As a result there was discontinuity between the initial literature review, the data collection and early analysis and the latter analysis and putting together of the thesis.

During the past few years there have been developments in the use of mobile technology within Western society with greater access to devices such as Smartphones and tablets, and access to Broadband and Wi-Fi internet connections, as well as a rise in the use of social media as a way of communicating with others (see postscript). These developments have made access to others much easier to achieve without moving away from the

childminders' settings. However, the childminders interviewed during the study did not have access to these communication systems. The considerations for practice as a result of the research, therefore, had the potential to appear dated. In an attempt to overcome this, I have drawn on my current knowledge of the e-learning environment, and current opportunities for reflecting with others when making suggestions for developing practices in the light of the findings from this research.

An additional challenge has been that of continuing to work in the field as an associate lecturer (AL) and, as part of my own professional development, making use of my emerging findings to reflect on and develop my own practice. In addition I took on a role within the central academic team part way through my doctoral research to develop module materials and assessment for the Level 1 work-based learning module. This role has involved carrying out additional research projects into areas that have some overlap with my doctoral research, such as the use of digital technology. These experiences have given me additional insight and potential data that could have been used within the research project and, as a result, have had the potential to muddy the waters at times or grow the research to unmanageable proportions. To address these issues and manage my time it has been essential to keep drawing myself back to the research question and to explicitly remind myself of the parameters of this study. I have also kept a note of areas for future research projects. In this way I have attempted to keep a tight focus on the task, whilst not losing sight of the further opportunities to develop knowledge and understanding of issues relevant to this research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In reflecting on the limitations of my research I have focused on three key areas: bias, the impact of research design decisions and the scope of the research, given that the research was a small-scale, time-limited study.

By being very clear in the writing up of my research about how the research was carried out at all stages I have tried to make explicit the potential for bias, and, thereby, aimed to limit the impact on the study overall. I was unable to overcome bias in the recruitment of participants and I am mindful that this has impacted on the findings, particularly in relation to the use of technology for reflecting with others. As discussed in Chapter 4, I was unable to recruit solely from my own tutorial groups. The eventual solution, to recruit other childminders through a request on the online, course-related forums brought both positive elements and limitations to the study. On the positive side, those childminders recruited through the on-line forums were keen to take part, having volunteered without being directly approached, and provided some rich data through extended discussions. Equally, it is likely that those recruited through the forum messages would be pro-ICT, used to using on-line discussion forums and technologically able.

The childminders responding to my request fell into two key bands – either they were very positive about childminding as a profession and/or they had an interest in research.

Childminding has always been something that I have
championed as the best possible childcare option, so would
love to help.(D)

...have signed up for next course to make BA/EYPS & will
prob (*sic*) go on for honours maybe more – just can't get
enough of the research! (H)

This, perhaps, should not have been surprising given that these childminders were engaging in their own investigations into their practice, but it did mean that, potentially, the childminders came with their own agenda. For example, some childminders were very pro-childminding and in the sense of wanting to 'sell' childminding these childminders may have been less like to tell me anything they felt was negative. Another childminder, in wanting to improve her own knowledge and understanding of how to effectively reflect on her practice and so asked as many questions as she answered.

Given the limits of time, on both the part of the participants in the research and myself, as the researcher, there were constraints on the data collection methods employed, and the scope of the research in order to keep the commitment manageable for all. These have been discussed in detail in Chapter 4, under research design. With limited research into childminders doing distance-learning study, the research has, however, achieved the raising of awareness of issues relevant to the research question. There are future opportunities to build on this study and I am interested to explore, amongst other areas, the use of the online environment for reflection, the continuation of reflective practice beyond study and to consider issues relation to different demographic groups of childminders to increase the pool of knowledge around lone workers and reflection.

Overall, despite the challenges and limitations outlined, I consider my research was successful in its aim of beginning to identify how childminders doing distance-learning study reflect on their practice. I also consider I have achieved an increased awareness of how childminders could effectively reflect on practice. The exploration of the needs of this particular group of students has enabled some workable suggestions for developing opportunities for reflecting with others to be put forward.

POSSIBILITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The childminders' responses to the general areas covered in this study – frequency of reflection, reflection with others (who, how and why), role of both module tutorials and module materials have opened up many other avenues for further exploration.

Several factors impacting on whom childminders reflect with were identified and these could be researched further to build on the emerging understanding discussed in this thesis, particularly in relation to the relative effectiveness of solo reflection and reflection with others.

Childminders' responses showed that they did not always feel the need to reflect with others. Solo reflection took place particularly at the point of action (Evans, 1999) and was considered by the childminders to be successful in making practice decisions, such as whether an activity met the needs of the child. Black (2006), researching pharmacists, also concluded that reflection with others is not essential to reflective learning. Further research would offer the opportunity to explore the effectiveness of reflecting both with and without others. Leading on from this,

further research would allow for exploring whether there is any impact on the level or depth of reflection (van Manen, 1977; Bain et al, 1999) when engaging in either solo reflection or reflection with others. Developing these aspects of my study could assist understanding of both how to develop effective module activities to promote reflection on practice, and the childminder's own understanding of how to become a reflective practitioner.

Going back a step and researching why childminders undertake study in the first place; why they choose a distance-learning mode of study and what their support networks were pre-study, would provide the opportunity to build up a picture of the decisions and circumstances childminders have to contend with. This can then develop understanding that can lead to workable solutions for childminders as to how they can engage in reflection with others when undertaking distance-learning study.

Childminders also commented on the difference between reflection on their practice when required as part of assessment and reflection within their day-to-day practice. Many module activities or assessment tasks within the FDEY ask students to identify a particular aspect of their practice and reflect on it. However, the majority of childminders interviewed did not see these as a useful means to reflect on their everyday practice. Further research into the reasons why and to explore how far the issue lies with the design of either the task itself, or the mode of delivery (such as whether the activity utilizes on-line forums, expects the student to arrange for a colleague to observe their practice, or use a reflective diary) may help module designers to write helpful tasks to encourage childminders to use module activities and assessment as a tool for reflection. Time for

reflection was raised as a barrier to reflection for all childminders involved in the study. Investigating strategies for merging tasks relating to both assessment and practice may also offer one way to overcome this barrier.

Finally, further research using mixed method methodology would offer the opportunity for triangulation and a more comprehensive and credible account of the findings (Bryman, 2006). The study identified the general groups of people that childminders reflected with, such as parents, other childminders or children, and focus of their reflections. This general approach, as discussed within the research design chapter, impacted on the conclusions that could be drawn from the research. Asking childminders to keep a diary of with whom they reflected and a brief comment about what they reflected on would offer the opportunity to engage in analysis of quantitative data and to corroborate some of the conclusions drawn from the qualitative methods used in this study by allowing the researcher to analyse factual information. If it is possible to negotiate a greater input into the research from childminders, and access to tangible evidence of reflection, such as reflective diary entries or assignments this, too, would open up opportunities to develop understanding of how childminders engage in reflection with others and how study impacts on, or supports, reflection on practice. Equally, access to tangible evidence of reflection may also identify issues of bias within the childminders' responses, as discussed under limitations of the study.

SUMMARY

This chapter has identified the strengths and weaknesses of aspects of the research and has commented on some of the key challenges of coping with changes that have taken place since beginning the study. In addition it has

considered key areas for further research in relation to the research methodology and findings.

The final chapter considers the conclusions drawn from carrying out this research project and the recommendations at individual, strategic and support levels.

Chapter 7 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter considers what has been learnt from the research. It considers the evidence presented and puts forward my own reflections on the data gathered throughout the research. It goes on to discuss recommendations at individual, strategic and support levels. A summary, and final conclusions, against the research questions will conclude the whole thesis.

WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNT FROM CARRYING OUT THE RESEARCH?

Research identified within my literature review (Chapter 2) indicated that reflection is something all practitioners *should* engage in. This is certainly borne out within early years documentation and all modules in the FDEY advocate reflection on practice, with the work-based learning module, *Personal Professional Development: Early Years Settings* (E115) clearly focusing on becoming a reflective practitioner.

During E115 you will be introduced to the processes that are involved in being a reflective practitioner. You will use these reflective practice processes to help you deepen your understandings in relation to the three themes, and how these relate to practice in your work setting.

(E115 Module Aims)

Taken from the on-line prospectus, (The Open University, 2006)

There is anecdotal evidence from childminders these aims are met and that the reflective tools they are introduced to as FDEY students support reflective practice, with twelve 2006 childminder students (2% of all enrolled students) mentioning reflection in their feedback on the module. These students all noted the positive impact of reflection, indicating that there have been improvements in their practice as a result of engaging with the Reflective Practice Cycle (Appendix 4).

I can see the benefit of reflective practice and now keep a daily journal of my practice. This is already helping in certain areas. **(S)**

The reflective aspect of the module has enabled me to reflect on my practice and has helped me to improve my practice. **(L)**

An acknowledgement of the value of reflective practice is further reinforced within an Ofsted leaflet (Ofsted, 2009), outlining the key aspects of best practice seen so far by inspectors under the EYFS. This noted that outstanding childminders see reflective practice as 'crucial to their success'.

This combination of sources of information promoting the importance of reflection for developing practice, alongside my own anecdotal evidence that good practice was discussed by those childminders who demonstrated through assignments and tutorial discussion that they could reflect on their practice drew my attention to the apparent benefits of reflection and becoming a reflective practitioners. As a tutor

my experiences showed that many childminders were reflective but it was not clear why or how childminders were successful in developing as reflective practitioners when the literature suggests that lone working and other isolating factors are not conducive to reflective practice.

This section discusses the final conclusions against the research questions.

The aim of this study has primarily been to identify and explore the issues impacting on a childminder's engagement in reflective practice and becoming a reflective practitioner. Although the rationale for the research was clear, at the start of the study there were no preconceived ideas as to the outcomes. This is characterised by the open-ended nature of the research questions which allowed themes to emerge.

In relation to my research question 'How do the childminders understand and interpret the term 'reflective practice' in the context of childminding', my findings indicate that when asked to articulate their understanding, 'reflective practice' is defined in the language of the study material, and seen as involving analysis and looking back on practice. In the context of their childminding practice, though, reflection is primarily focused on their daily practice and seen as reactive; in response to an incident, or a current issue they need to deal with. When discussing reflective practices during the interviews the childminders talked interchangeably about 'discussing' their practice or 'thinking' about practice, as well as 'reflecting' on practices. It may be that the childminders were just sloppy in their use of language when communicating with me, but it may also have been that they found it difficult to articulate any differences in depth of reflection (van Manon, 1977). Reflection seems to be linked to changes in daily practices, and

having a direct impact on the children and families they are working with.

Reflection was only touched on by a minority of childminders as a professional development tool for themselves as childminders, and any reference to reflecting at a different level came out of the interviews as a result of discussion, rather than something that the childminders volunteered. This suggests that the childminders, on the whole, have a limited conscious, or articulated understanding of the breadth of reflective practice.

My second research question focuses on how the childminder's *understanding* of reflective practice and its uses changes through the FDEY. The examples given by the childminders suggest that reflective practice did change as the childminders progressed through the FDEY. The use of reflective tools and the expectation to reflect on practice as part of assessment seemed to drive this change, rather than the change in understanding prompting a self-motivated change in its use. Nevertheless, the examples also indicate childminders recognised the gains to themselves and their practice of deeper reflection informed by theory, particularly in respect of how they are perceived by other professionals. The act of taking part in my research had the effect of focusing thinking on changes to their reflective practices and, therefore, although use of reflective practice did appear to change during their studies on the FDEY, the development of their understanding of reflective practice and its uses as a product of their studies, was not so clearly articulated.

The third research question focuses on the extent to which participation in study *increased* reflective practice among the childminders. The questionnaire responses indicated reflective practice had increased and that they thought more

about what they did, as a result of their studies. Their practice examples, such as the way they keep the daily diaries, indicated the childminders continued to reflection on the same practice issues, as well as introducing practices that supported reflection as a integral part of their role. However, there were a range of factors identified that could hamper reflective practice, such as finding the time to reflect in depth on practice.

The fourth research question focuses on the factors influencing the childminders when deciding with whom to reflect. The research demonstrated that study identifies the need for others as part of the reflective process for reflection to be at a deeper level (van Manen, 1977), with two key points emerging from my research impacting on the options available for childminders for reflection with others who had the knowledge to engage at this deeper level. Firstly, it became clear that although there was the involvement of others at some point in the process, for the most part reflection on practice that had the capacity to develop the childminders as reflective practitioners and impact on their professional identity, often took place in isolation. This deeper reflection on practice was often carried out outside of the working day, late at night or at weekends. This is when other childcare professionals are unlikely to be available, and the ones that are are those who have equally 'unsociable' working patterns – in other words, other childminders!

Secondly, the childminders' responses within the interviews showed that the childminders recognized that they had changed and no longer aligned themselves with other childminders who were not undertaking study. They articulated clearly the difficulties they had discussing practice with these other childminders. However, their identity as a professional frequently barred them from feeling

comfortable or confident enough to reflect with other professionals within the childcare community of practice.

For most of the childminders, there appeared to be no conscious decision to seek out others they could reflect with at a transforming practice level, although this did not preclude this deeper level of reflection happening on occasions with those 'available'. Daily contact with others involved in their day-to-day practice afforded opportunities to discuss their everyday practice, but this was mostly at the level of discussing issues such as the appropriateness of activities for the children. Study demanded engagement with others on module-related forums but reflection on practice as part of study was not, however, seen as the same as reflection on the everyday practice. In both these instances there were people 'available' but they were not necessarily 'ideal'.

The data suggests to me that at a largely unconscious level the majority of childminders in the study, in addition to learning how to use reflective tools to reflect on practice, had to manage the breakdown of the relationships they had with other childminders pre-study, and negotiate new relationships in order to engage in transformative reflection with others. It seems that initially the childminders tried to overcome the loss of other childminders to reflect with by reflecting with others they trusted and who understood their practice. There was some use of specific individuals who could offer the support necessary to enable depth of reflection, but few of the childminders seemed to do more than make do with who was available at the point of reflection.

The final research question focuses on how the childminder's professional identity impacts on their reflective practice. If effective reflection is linked to the importance of belonging to a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998) and childminders' comments indicate that study is successful in fostering irreversible transformational learning (Choy, 2009:66) then it seems important to find ways of raising the childminders' awareness of what is happening during the process of becoming a reflective practitioner. Equally if study enables the childminders to see themselves as professionals and reflect with other professionals working within childcare, such as nursery teachers, yet also alienates them from the childminders who were their sources of support before, it is important that some mechanism for supporting childminders in this transition is put into place. This loss of their pre-study support system, such as the local childminding groups where they could discuss practice issues, before they had developed another that took into account the growth in their knowledge and understanding of practice, created a 'liminal space' (Leverett, 2008). The confidence to see themselves on a par with childcare workers takes time to grow and so this liminal space (where they feel displaced and have limited support) can span a considerable time. Some childminders had found a solution for the duration of their studies by having their own Facebook site for childminders studying on the OU FDEY. This bringing together childminders who were also students enabled a relationship with others who can offer mutual support and empathy (Taylor, 2007:163).

The process of developing as a professional and adopting professional practices such as reflection informed by theoretical ideas, appeared to start with study for the childminders. However the point at which the childminders moved from feeling they were 'just' a childminder to a childminder who saw themselves as a

professional, and the factors impacting on this was unclear within this study.

Having kept in contact with some of the childminders who took part in this study I noted that over a period of four or five years they had taken on roles that had greater professional status or roles that included professional skills and qualities (see postscript). There is scope for research around this area to gain an understanding of how to support childminders, not to move away from childminding, but to see themselves as professionals, part of which is becoming a reflective practitioner.

RECOMMENDATIONS AT INDIVIDUAL, STRATEGIC AND SUPPORT LEVELS

This section considers recommendations for all those involved in the development of reflective practice for childminders, including the childminders themselves. I have focused on two areas coming out of my research: the development of professional identity and supporting the engagement in reflection with others. These stood out as key factors for childminders studying on work-based learning modules through distance-learning. Recommendations have been put forward at three levels: strategic, which includes policy makers and the module teams working on each of the FDEY modules; support, which includes the module tutor; and individual, which includes the childminder.

The findings from this research around perceptions of childminders as professionals suggest that the answer to the research question is broader than just study and those involved with study including the childminders themselves. The issue is complex and involves changing societal perceptions, as well as the views of professionals involved with children's services. At a policy level, expecting childminders to meet the same standards and expectations as other childcare

professionals would visibly include childminders as part of the childcare community of practice. This would also open up opportunities for childminders to be involved in continuing professional development activities and belong to quality improvement networks. This will enable childminders to access support and training.

Nearly all the childminders commented in one way or another on the status of childminders within the childcare profession. Clark et al (2005) in exploring the 'voice of the child' discusses how different techniques have been devised to make visible the voices of the least powerful members of communities. There should also be further consideration of the way in which childminders are rewarded for pursuing professional development opportunities: as the results of this survey demonstrate, childminders currently receive no financial advantage from achieving higher qualifications. Mechanisms such as the quality supplement within the Early Years Single Funding Formula (DCSF, 2009), through which childminders delivering the free entitlement can be remunerated at a higher rate if they have more advanced qualifications, may be particularly helpful in rewarding further training, and so engaging childminders in reflection with others and becoming a reflective practitioner.

There are many challenges for the writers of distance-learning module materials where there is only broad commonality between students. The childminders' perceptions of module materials indicated that they cater for the majority of students (that is, those in group based settings) and childminders are left to adapt learning activities or find their own solutions. This impacted on the ease with which they could relate to the reflective activities and potentially on becoming a

reflective practitioners as some may not be at the stage of being able to apply material. At the module design phase, module teams could include childminding practice within examples in the module materials. They could also consider the difficulties childminders have in reflecting with others and set up learning opportunities and module activities in a way that enabled childminders to reflect with those they feel at ease with. The online environment has the potential to address many of the issues childminders highlighted as a problem for reflections, such as accessibility to others. The childminders identified many issues relating to the use of the online environment. However, maybe making module teams aware of the importance of spending time building up relationships in an online environment may help childminders and other lone workers to engage with others, as may paying attention to the setting up of online activities to minimize difficulties.

The tutor guidance materials for modules within the FDEY, are currently primarily focused on tutorial input and assessment feedback, rather than the full gambit of roles that appear to be essential to developing the childminders as reflective practitioners, such as developing confidence or providing challenge to thinking about practice. Extending tutor guidance materials to stress the importance of a nurturing role and a consideration of how childminders can be supported to reflect on practice offers the potential to utilize the study experience more effectively to support reflection on practice. The research served to highlight that study has the power to bring about a change in reflective habits and begin the process of transforming identity. It also noted the value of being challenged to think deeply about practice and engage with knowledgeable reflective partners. However, the reflective partners chosen by most childminders, particularly those they engaged with face-to-face, often did not have this capacity. Heightening the tutors'

awareness of the particular challenges for childminders and providing guidance on how to support them would overcome some of the difficulties childminders have in engaging in reflective practice.

Tutor materials could promote a role in supporting childminders to cross the boundaries when engaging with other professionals. Wenger (2010) suggested that boundaries can be seen as learning assets – suggesting that facilitating discussion with others within the landscape and bringing out into the open the challenges of working with other professionals, or different perspectives, rather than suggesting that once they know, or do, 'X' practice will be unproblematic, offers rich learning opportunities. Engaging tutors in thinking about how they can act as a broker to articulate knowledgeability across boundaries (Wenger, 2010) could offer the opportunity for childminders and all students to engage with others. 'Reflection is a vital element of professional identity building' (Dysthe and Steinar Engelsen, 2008) and, as it is generally accepted that deep reflection requires others to be involved in the process, the tutor's role could be seen as opening up the opportunities for sharing reflections with trusted peers, as well as engaging in dialogue with the childminder through feedback on reflective assignments submitted for assessment.

The following would seem to be important elements to stress within tutor materials:

- Empowering childminders to see themselves as equal professionals
- Helping to make the links between the course material and a childminding context
- Offering the space for reflection and self-assessment

- Acting as a broker to provide links between, and understanding of, different perspectives within the landscape of practice
- Providing opportunities for boundary encounters, and bringing multiple voices together, through course activities

Nurturing childminders' growing confidence in their knowledge and understanding of the theory behind their practice can help to create the situation where childminders feel more equal to other professionals working within childcare. The more childminders engage in boundary encounters with other professionals, the more they build up their understanding of other's practice and knowledge and begin to identify with other professionals and see themselves as on an equal footing. They can then begin to see themselves as having equal, or complementary, knowledge and understanding with the opportunity to apply this increased confidence to an encounter with other professionals.

In addition to nurturing any growing confidence, the tutor role could also be seen to initiate and encourage childminders to move outside their comfort zone and challenge themselves to share perspectives, both so that others may understand the childminding perspective, and that childminders may understand where others are coming from. This open sharing could allow practitioners the opportunity to visualise the practice of others and create greater empathy across the boundaries.

As childminders do not need the FDEY in order to be a childminder, it can be assumed that none were averse to engaging in a transformative learning experience (Taylor, 2007:183). It is evident within this study that in the process of challenging themselves and transforming their practice their perceptions of self

changed. Whilst in the liminal space (Leverett, 2008) where they were not yet seeing themselves as a professional they needed the support of the module materials and a tutor to help them to make the transition to seeing themselves as equal to others within their community of practice.

Above all it needs to be remembered that transforming identity is not a speedy process. The changes to habits and thinking about professional identity do not happen instantaneously and so it is necessary to find ways to enable childminders to sustain the changes that study brings to the fore and provide strategies that will support them post study to fully become a reflective practitioner. The research identified some key questions childminders need to ask of themselves when deciding whom to reflect with. 'Why am I reflecting' and 'what do I hope to achieve through my reflections' leading childminders to think about 'who is the best person to help me reflect'. As part of this process childminders also have to take into account the nature of childminding and context within which they are studying and think about 'what are the constraints'.

At an individual level childminders need to be mentally prepared for the process of reflection on practice and the changes effective reflection can bring about. They need to understand that transformative reflective practice can be a painful process and that it takes time to gain the skills necessary to reflect with others who can engage them in effective reflection. In addition, they should be aware of the need to keep an open mind on new ways of working and of the necessity to finding new ways to engage with others. The childminders had a preference for face-to-face communication but technology can bring colleagues closer and so offer flexibility in terms of people to reflect with and the timing of reflective opportunities.

SUMMARY AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

To return to my research questions, analysis of the data indicated variations in the reasons study resulted in an change in understanding of reflection. Some childminders felt that they understood the value of reflection better and that this in turn encouraged them to find ways of reflecting on their practice. For others it was the increase in underpinning theoretical knowledge that gave them the ability to know what they could, or should, reflect on. This increase in knowledge also brought with it empowerment and a professional identity (McGillivray, 2008) leading to feelings, for most of the childminders, of being more equal in status to other child carers. This professionalization of childminders through study is identified within current debates on the professionalization of childcare workers within the Early Years sector as a whole (Miller and Cable, 2008). Whilst it emerged as to be a crucial issue for the childminders in this study, when making choices over with whom to reflect, it also brought with it difficulties in respect of the liminal space (Leverett, 2008) it created.

All childminders either perceived themselves, or felt that others perceived them, as having low status. The importance of having a *professional* identity in raising their status and opening up opportunities for reflection with others was evident in all childminders' responses. 'Reflection is generally acknowledged as a key professional attribute' (Cable and Miller, 2008:173) and, therefore, by becoming a reflective practitioner a childminder can be seen as professional, and raise their status within the childcare profession, opening up opportunities to reflect with other professionals.

In conclusion, this study has developed my own thinking in relation to how a childminder, doing distance-learning study, engages in reflection with others and develops as a reflective practitioner. I have gained greater insight into the particular issues faced by childminders and begun to develop strategies for supporting childminders within my current roles within The Open University. The study has also presented a number of emerging themes warranting further exploration and I intend to continue to develop my research in this field, alongside dissemination of the current findings.

POSTSCRIPT

As noted at the start of this thesis, the early years landscape is a constantly changing one. There have been some significant changes between the gathering of data and the writing up of this doctoral thesis that are worth noting here.

Over the past four years, since the introduction of the EYFS curriculum in 2008, the government has invested heavily in improving the quality of early years provision, primarily within group settings, with initiatives such as EYPS, Every Child a Talker initiative and the Early Years Quality Improvement support programme. However, this focus on group-based care has resulted in childminders being deemed by Ofsted in their 2011/12 report (Ofsted, 2012) to offer a good level of *care*, but with many finding it more challenging to provide for *learning and development*. This indicates a wider quality gap than in pre-EYFS reports.

Changes in government policy in 2012 threaten to further weaken the positive changes to the professional status of childminders underpinning the EYFS curriculum documents brought in by the Labour government in 2008. The Coalition government in 2012 introduced a revised EYFS document that retains the requirement for childminders to follow the statutory curriculum guidance, but does not require childminders to undergo any mandatory training in order to be registered as a childminder. The Coalition government also proposes to deregulate childminders, meaning that they will no longer be required to be inspected by Ofsted, the organization which inspects and regulates services which

care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages. These government proposals have the potential to reintroduce inequality into how different childcare provision is perceived, and so impact on how the professional identity of childminders is perceived by not only other professionals working within the field of childcare, but the childminders themselves.

At the same time, there is a heightened awareness of reflection as a key component of practice, and there has been a growth in research and material for practitioners around reflective practice. The National Childminding Association has recently published a book 'The EYFS and You' (NCMA, 2012) that promotes reflection on practice as a key factor in effective practice.

There has been an explosive growth in social networking and the accessibility of mobile technology in the past few years, with the rise of Smartphones and tablets, and access to Broadband and WiFi internet connection. This offers a much greater opportunity to interact with others in a virtual environment. Whether or not this is the answer for childminders for engaging in reflection with others remains to be seen.

Known changes to the career pathways of some of the childminders involved in the study suggest that there have been changes in the professional identity of these childminders since completion of the FDEY to provide them with the confidence to take on a role that affords increased professional status.

(B) has become an Ofsted inspection officer

(C) is working as a learning support assistant in a primary school

(D) has taken on a campaign role to raise the profile of childminders

(E) continued with her studies beyond the FDEY, gaining a BA (Hons) and has just started training to be a social worker

(G) works for a local authority as an early years trainer

(H) has continued with her childminding career on a part-time basis but is also a mentor and assessor for childminders undertaking the EYPS programme

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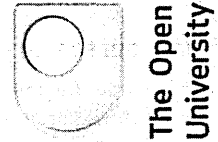
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1



Foundation Degree in Early Years

What is The Open University Foundation Degree in Early Years?

The Open University's Foundation Degree in Early Years is a Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree. This is a part-time qualification taught through a combination of the OU's long-established supported 'Open-Learning' method, and work-based learning. It includes courses that involve a combination of home study and practical activities to be undertaken in the workplace.

Who is the Foundation Degree for?

The Foundation Degree in Early Years is suitable for experienced practitioners working directly with young children aged between birth and seven years, in a range of early years settings, and for teaching assistants specialising in early years, especially those working in nursery and reception classes. It will provide knowledge and skills required for working with children in these settings.

What are the entry requirements?

It is expected that you will have gained at least two years' recent experience working directly with young children in an early years setting prior to starting the Foundation Degree (FD). During your studies you will need to be working directly with young children for a minimum of five hours a week in term time in order to complete the work-related and work-based assignments within the programme.

How long will it take?

The Open University Foundation Degree in Early Years is equivalent to two years' full-time study or 240 CATS points. We expect that most people will take up to four years to complete their Foundation Degree.



The absolute minimum study time is two years and 8 months, which would be the equivalent to full-time study and would require exceptional commitment to studying.

To then complete an unclassified, 300 point BA Early Years degree would take at least another year, studying a further 60 point course at Level 3. To continue so that you complete a 360 point BA (Honours) Early Years degree would then require a further 60 points of study at Level 3.

For graduates who hold a sector-endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years we offer a Shortened BA and BA (Hons) Early Years; see www.open.ac.uk/study (qualification code B60) for more information about this qualification.

You need to be aware that there are time limits for completing all the courses to be awarded the Foundation Degree in Early Years or the BA and BA (Hons) Early Years. Please refer to the qualification descriptions at www.open.ac.uk/study.

What courses do I need to take?

The Foundation Degree in Early Years requires 240 points of study. You need to take the following courses to complete your degree:

LEVEL 1

At Level 1, there are two compulsory core courses worth 120 points together:

1. *The early years: developing practice* (E100: 60 points)*
A Certificate in Early Years Practice will be awarded to students on the successful completion of E100.
2. *Professional practice in the early years* (E105**: 60 points work-based learning course)
* Please note: E100 replaces *Working with children in the early years* (E123: 30 points) and *Supporting children's learning in the early years* (E124: 30 points)

Presentations of E123 and E124 will be available starting in October until 2011. These courses are only for existing students who have passed one of these two courses and wish to study the other to complete the Certificate in Early Years Practice (NQF level 4)

** Please note that E105 replaces E115 *Personal professional development: early years settings*.

LEVEL 2

At Level 2, there is one compulsory core course (60 points):

Extending personal professional development (E215: 60 points work-based learning course)

At Level 2, one 60 point course should be chosen from the following options:

- *Child development* (ED209: 60 points)
- *Childhood* (U212: 60 points)
- *Working with children, young people and families* (K218: 60 points, new from February 2011)
- *Inclusive education: learning from each other* (E243***: 30 points) WITH *Ways of knowing: language, mathematics and science in the early years* (E230: 30 points).

*** E243 will not be presented again. Students who have already successfully passed the course can still count it towards the Foundation Degree in Early Years and the BA and BA (Hons) Early Years as long as they meet the time limit criteria for the awards.

After completing the FD in Early Years, which courses lead to a BA Early Years?

To progress to the unclassified BA Early Years (B51 or B60) you must study the compulsory course:

- *Working together for children* (KE312: 60 points)

You can then continue to study and progress to the BA (Honours) Early Years (B51 or B60) by taking the final compulsory course:

- *Early years focus on research with children and young people* (EK311: 60 points)

When will it start?

The first course, E100, starts in October each year. You are advised to check the course descriptions at www.open.ac.uk/study for start dates of all courses.

Foundation Degrees sound daunting - is there an easier way to get started?

If you haven't studied at a higher-education level before, or have been out of education for some time, our Openings courses are a great place to start.

Openings courses are designed to help you develop your learning skills and build your confidence while developing workplace skills. You'll have your own personal tutor, work from top-quality course materials and, as with most OU courses, the only entry qualification is your motivation.

What do children need to develop their self esteem and how can being consistent, open and honest support their personal growth?

Prepared with the needs of new learners in mind our Openings course *Understanding Children* (Y156) gives you the chance to consider the needs, rights and choices of the under 11s as they grow up in the world.

How do I study?

The Open University uses a proven method of learning called supported 'Open Learning', designed for people studying in their own time. All your course materials are included in the price. These may include:

- books
- other printed materials
- DVDs
- CDs, CD-ROM
- websites

For each course you will be allocated a personal tutor with whom you can talk by phone or face to face at tutorials and contact via e-mail or computer forum.

You will also have opportunities to meet and exchange ideas with other students. Your tutor will help you to keep your studies on track and to progress with confidence.

How is the Foundation Degree assessed?

A range of assessment methods will be used including written assignments and an end of course assessment which may be an exam or may be submission of a project (check individual course descriptions at www.open.ac.uk/study).

Within the work-based learning courses, the assignments will require you to present evidence of the development of your practice against relevant learning outcomes.

What do I need?

For some courses you may need a television (including a DVD player) and a CD player.

For most courses (for example work-based learning courses) you will need to have regular access to a computer (which meets The Open University minimum specification, e.g. internet connection); this will also enable you to use the CD-ROM and websites associated with courses that make up the degree.

For all of the courses within the degree, there will be online (computer) forums providing you with another way to contact your tutor and also other students.

Computer skills

We assume you can use a computer and can word process, in order to be able to follow the foundation degree.

You will be given information about how to obtain access to the online forums when you begin E100 to enable you to participate in the forum.

ICT skills will also form part of the material covered in the work-based learning courses (E105 and E215). The key is that you are able to:

- access the internet;
- edit, save and print out .doc files;
- install necessary software (e.g. Adobe Acrobat Reader, anti-virus software).

Do I need support from my employer?

In order to be able to complete the work-based elements in courses E100 (or E123 and E124), E105 and E215, you must have permission from your employer to explore and report on your own practice within your work setting.

They will be required to sign a Permission Agreement Form as part of your registration documentation, thus, you must have their support in order to complete the work-based parts of the Foundation Degree.

Do I need criminal record clearance?

To work in an early years setting you will need to meet the 'fit person' criteria for doing so, including obtaining the necessary criminal record clearance required for the setting and country in which you are working, including registration with the new Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) if appropriate.

It is the responsibility of you and your employer to ensure you meet these requirements, and not The Open University.

For E100, E123, E124, E105 and E215 your employer will have to sign a form to confirm that you do have an appropriate criminal record clearance - we would normally assume that this means that you have an enhanced clearance.

What will the Foundation Degree in Early Years do for my career?

This foundation degree has been endorsed and recognised by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) and we expect it will be highly regarded in the early years sector.

In England, Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degrees are an important progression route for students who wish to progress to Early Years Professional Status (see below).

The Foundation Degree will also be helpful for anyone who wants to train as an Early Years Teacher (see below).



How do I achieve Early Years Professional Status (EYPS)?

Students who have successfully completed a Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree in Early Years will need to 'top up' to an unclassified, 300 point, Bachelors degree and have GCSE mathematics and English grades A-C or equivalent.

Candidates should be in a work setting with children aged between birth to five years in England.

The Open University, in partnership with the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), is a provider for the Validation, Full Training and Long Pathways to achieving EYPS in 2010/2011.

Graduates with Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree can top up their foundation degree and undertake the assessment for EYPS via the Long Pathway. The next start date for the Long Pathway is January 2011.

For further information about EYPS go to:

www.open.ac.uk/cys/p3_4.shtml

and

www.ndna.org.uk/quality-training/early-years-workforce/eyps/

For advice about EYPS email eyps@ndna.org.uk or telephone NDNA on 01484 40 70 78.

Can I progress to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) from the FD in Early Years?

The Foundation Degree may be helpful for anyone who wants to train as an Early Years Teacher. It should be noted that The Open University does not offer courses for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in the primary age range and we cannot guarantee automatic progression from the Foundation Degree to ITE training programmes with other providers. You must check with your local training provider about their entry policy.

For further information about early years courses and awards (other than EYPS) go to:

www.open.ac.uk/study

or

call 0845 300 60 90

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SUP 017894

APPENDIX 2

Structure of The Open University Foundation Degree in Early Years

Order of study	Module code and title		Start date (annually)	Type of module
1	Any one of: E123 (30 points) EZL123 APEL (30 points)	These two modules may be studied in any order, or together, but must be completed before starting E115	February	Vocationally related
2	Any one of: E124 (30 points) EZL124 APEL (30 points)		February	Vocationally related
3	E115 (60 points)		October	Work-based learning*
4	60 points from the following: ED209 (60 points), U212 (60 points) or K204 (60 points) E230 (30 points) and E243(30 points)		January / February	Option modules
5	E215 (60 points)		October	Work-based learning*

*Work-based learning modules require students to be employed and able to carry out activities in the workplace

Adapted from the Award Guide for the Foundation Degree in Early Years (2007)

To embark on the OU FDEY, practitioners are expected to have gained at least two years’ experience within an early years setting, although they may have no formal qualifications

The Open University FDEY is structured so that the first two modules (E123 and E124) support students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the theory underpinning their practice. The second, and final, Level 1 module (E115) introduces students to the Reflective Practice Cycle (RPC) and the 3 Layer Model (Appendix 4) as tools to investigate and reflect on their own practice, and offers a method of documenting evidence of practice to illustrate what they do.

APPENDIX 3

Foundation Degree in Early Years - Learning Outcomes

Educational aims

To develop and enhance your intellectual and practical skills, required for working as non-teacher professionals at an advanced level in the field of early years.

To prepare you to engage with further study, enquiry and practice where knowledge of early years is required.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding

On completion of this degree you will have knowledge and understanding of:

- learning and development in children aged between birth and seven years
- the principles underpinning early years policy and practice
- awareness of early years issues, theories and research that underpin practice
- the curriculum for children aged between birth and seven years, observation and assessment strategies and procedures
- the way ethnicity, religion, caste/class, gender, sexuality and disability impacts on children and their development and the implications of differentiation, inequality and exclusion and strategies designed to tackle these issues
- policies and provisions relating to the regulation/promotion of children's status, welfare, learning including how these impact on children (and adults) in home, school and other contexts
- the value of interprofessional collaboration.

Cognitive skills

On completion of the degree you will be able to:

- analyse and evaluate practice critically and systematically
- select and integrate ideas and evidence to present arguments
- identify connections and discontinuities between knowledge and its application in practical contexts

- accommodate new principles, understandings and evidence and formulate proposals for practice in the light of these
- reflect on your own values and those of others
- show evidence of reflective practice through written case studies assignments and projects.

Practical and/or professional skills

On completion of the degree you will be able to demonstrate the following skills:

- work effectively both in a team and independently on an agreed project or task
- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to problem solving as appropriate to employment roles
- demonstrate the experience, knowledge and skills that underpin good practice and apply theory to practice
- carry out aspects of work roles in relation to young children and their families to the standards expected in employment
- design, implement, monitor, assess programmes to support children's development and learning
- work with, support and/or supervise colleagues as appropriate and where relevant, work with parents, carers and other professionals
- manage and organise time, resources, records and information to support decision-making.

Key skills

On completion of the degree you will be able to demonstrate the following skills

Communication

- organise and articulate opinions and arguments
- write accurately and clearly in styles adapted to purpose and context
- draw on appropriate conventions of academic writing
- take account of and respond sensitively to diverse viewpoints
- read purposefully, identifying and recording what is relevant from a range of resource material
- participate effectively in communities of practice in face-to-face communication.

Information technology

- have the opportunity to participate effectively in communities of practice through computer-mediated communication
- use ICT to enhance your learning
- develop and use ICT skills.

Application of number

- use and interpret graphical and numerical data.

Learning how to learn

- plan and manage time
- analyse tasks and make plans to tackle them
- seek and learn from feedback to improve performance
- learn from a variety of different media and different teaching methods, including using ICT to enhance your learning
- learn from personal experience and apply it to practical issues
- reflect on the learning process and personal progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses.

Teaching, learning and assessment methods

Knowledge and understanding of early childhood are developed through the main teaching materials and in-text questions, tasks and activities. The main teaching material is offered through supported open-learning modules and includes module texts, audiovisual material, and directed reading. Summative assessment is by written tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and by end-of-module examinations where appropriate. Tutors support your development through online and telephone support, letters, tutorials and written feedback on assignments.

Cognitive skills are assessed by module assignments. These will allow you to demonstrate your ability to structure a clear and reasoned argument, and to critically analyse module issues. The Personal Development Plan and Work-Based Learning Project will offer you the opportunity to demonstrate:

- independent thinking skills
- your understanding of theoretical concepts, the underpinning principles for early years practice in a work-based context and appropriate methods of enquiry
- and the opportunity to document evidence of reflective practice.

Key skills are referenced to QCA National Standards and are promoted within learning materials and as part of continuous assessment. TMAs require you to demonstrate your ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of formats and to show evidence of working with others. Learning skills focusing on planning, self-assessment, identifying strengths and weaknesses, setting priorities and targets, reviewing and reflecting are a feature of the Personal Development Plan, the general approach to key skills and the work-based learning components. Assessment may include witness testimony from colleagues. Use of Information Communications Technology will be a requirement of the work-based learning components and students will be required to work together electronically.

Professional skills are developed as part of an increased understanding of good practice in supporting children's learning and development through teaching materials and work-based reflective practice. The assessment of practice skills is via module work, including the submission of evidence of having met the work-based learning outcomes that is confirmed in the work place, analytical accounts of how practice was evaluated and a work-based project report.

APPENDIX 4

Reflective tools students are introduced to during their study as part of the FDEY

Keeping a reflective learning journal or e-learning journal

Students are introduced to the idea of keeping a Reflective Learning Journal as a key part of getting the most out of their studies on the module. Reflective learning is a common and valuable approach to helping improve the way in which students study and learn, by enabling them to think about what they are studying and how they are studying. The first work-based learning module (E115) discusses the importance of being a reflective practitioner, and keeping a reflective learning journal is suggested as a way of developing this key professional skill.

Example template of reflective learning journal

Week : Date:					
Task	What did I learn?	What did I enjoy?	What will I do differently?	Feedback from others	Notes
Activity 1.1 Professional journeys (DVD-based)	Identified the experiences I am bringing to E105	I enjoyed looking back at my career and how I have got to the point I am at now. It was nice to capture my personal story and to feel I already have a lot of skills and knowledge	Jot down the exact time in the sequence when I heard a key point – I kept forgetting where I had heard a really useful example and this meant I had to keep re-listening to the DVD		My notes will be useful for TMA 02
Activity 1.2 A practitioner's knowledge-in-action	It helped me to understand how I use my knowledge to help me	Talking to another practitioner about why they do what they do	Make sure I am clear about what I want to find out about and to make some	It would have been easier if I had given them time to think about what I	

(Setting-based)	with my role without thinking consciously about it		planning notes to refer to	wanted to know, rather than interviewing them 'cold'	
Activity 1.3 Factors Influencing leadership					
(ICT-based)					

The example will have given you some ideas about the kinds of things you can be writing in your reflective learning journal. The main thing, as stated earlier, is that reflection must work for you so adapt your entries to suit your needs. Reflecting is a skill that can take a little time to develop but persevere - it is a skill which will not only help you in your studies but will also help you in the work place where reflection is increasingly a skill that is highly valued by employers.

Reflective frameworks

Students are introduced to two frameworks to support them in reflecting on their practice in the first work-based learning module.

THE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE CYCLE

The Reflective Practice Cycle used in E115 consists of four stages, as follows.

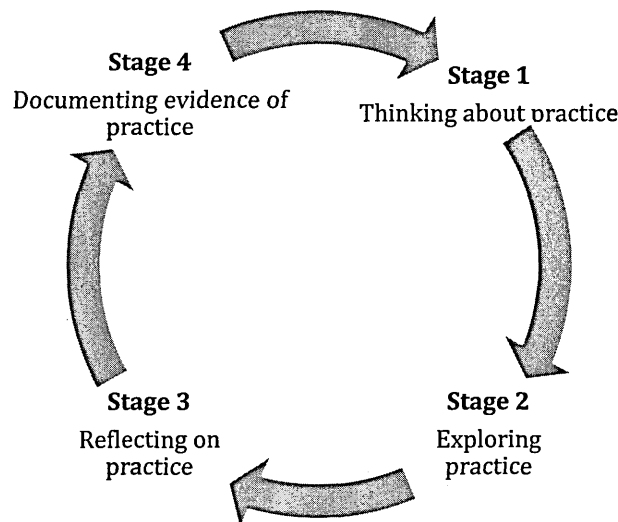


Figure 1 The Reflective Practice Cycle
(adapted from E115 Study Guide, Part 1 (The Open University, 2005, p22-23)

The reflective practice cycle focuses on the practicalities of work-based enquiry. Students work through the stages of the reflective practice cycle whilst investigating aspects of their practice.

Questions to explore for each stage of the Reflective Practice Cycle

Stage	Questions to explore
1	What do I know and believe about early years practice? What do I know about my practice What do I want to find out? What is my key question?
2	How can I collect data to help me answer my key question? How can I organise the data to help me describe my practice more objectively?
3	To what extent does my new description fit with what I thought my practice was like? How does my new description compare with my knowledge, values and beliefs about

	practice? How, if necessary, could I refine my practice to fit more closely with my knowledge, values and beliefs? How have my knowledge, values and beliefs changed as a result of my investigation and reflection?
4	To what extent have I met the EYCLOs for this theme? What evidence can I use to show this, and how should I present it?

Taken from E115 Study Guide: Part 1 (The Open University, 2006: 23)

THE THREE LAYER MODEL

The three-layer model is not a recipe for investigating practice, but rather illustrates a process to develop ideas, challenge assumptions, and reflect on what the student does. It offers a visual representation of the process of thinking about developing practice.

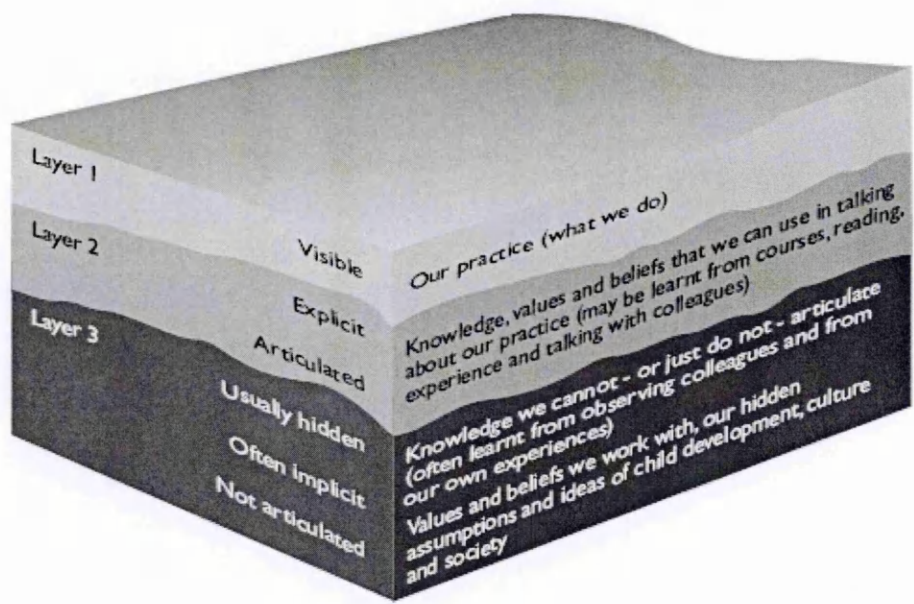


Figure 2 The 3 Layer Model
(taken from E115 Study Guide, Part 1 (The Open University, 2005, p19)

These tools for reflection are further developed in the final module in the Foundation Degree (E215) where students use the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001) to listen to the voice of a child in their setting to investigate their practice.

Throughout their studies students are offered a range of different ways of reflecting on their practice, although the assumption is that reflection will be with others. The following examples, taken from the two work-based learning modules, show how the modules utilize different techniques to support reflection, with adaptation or suggestions to accommodate individuals' circumstances.

Reflective activities

Activity 1

To find out what your evidence might reveal about the 'hidden layer' of your practice, you should try to get the perspective of another early years practitioner. [...] Find a practitioner who is willing to look at examples of evidence you have selected. [...] either by email or by post. [...] Use this colleague, friend, or fellow student as a 'sounding board' to help you to see if your evidence can tell you something about your practice which you were not aware of before

Ask them to consider:

- what the evidence tells them about your understanding of working with parents
- what they think your values and beliefs might be from looking at the evidence.

Make notes on their responses. Of course you can't just 'read off' what is in your Layer 3 from their responses. What they say, and how they interpret your practice, is determined by their own approach to working with parents. But you can note down your reactions to what they say. Are there aspects you are surprised about? Are there comments you think might echo your own understanding of working with parents? Did they say things about your knowledge or values that you don't think reflect your approach? If so, does thinking about your practice in this light help you to say how your own approach is different?

Taken from E115 Personal Professional Development: Early Years Settings (The Open University, 2005)

Activity 2

In preparation for this [on-line forum] activity we were asked to reflect on our own perspectives and experiences of inclusion and we were provided with a few questions to aid our reflection. Hopefully we've all got some thoughts and examples to share in this [on-line forum] discussion.

First we need to share our understanding of the term inclusion [...]

Next we need to share some experiences (these could be things we have done in our settings, things we have read or other experiences) that have helped to form our views and opinions. We need to say how and why these experiences have been important. [...]

Then we need to try to describe what inclusive practice actually looks like and it will be good to share some examples that we feel illustrates this.

[...]

Finally we need to suggest some ways forward, to overcome barriers to inclusion, for ourselves and the children and parents we work with. [...]

Taken from E215 Extending personal professional development (The Open University, 2006)

As students progress through the FDEY there is greater emphasis on e-learning as illustrated by the second activity, E215 has a heavy on-line component and expects students to reflect with others, on set topics, within on-line forums, with these contributing to assignment grades. At the other end of the scale, within E123 and E124, students are encouraged to access the national and tutor group forums in an initial welcome letter, currently have no on-line activities as part of the modules.

APPENDIX 5**Profile of students returning questionnaire**

Shaded heading = recruited from coursewide on-line forum
 Shaded boxes = childminders interviewed

	A	B	C	D	E
Age	31-40	41-50	41-50	41-50	31-40
Type of schooling	Comprehensive	Grammar	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Private
Academic achievement	GCSE	'A' Level	CSE + typing & shorthand	'A' level	RGN
Environment	Large village	Large village	Small village	Small village	Small village
Own children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of childminding experience	6 years	19 years	5 years	8 years	6 ½ years
Any other employment	No	Yes Childcare tutor	No	No	No
Past career	Legal secretary	-	Secretary	Children's home worker	Teaching assistant
Attendance at tutorials	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Use of on-line forums	Daily	Course activities only	Daily	Daily	Course activities only

	F	G	H	I	J
Age	41-50	31-40	31-40	25-30	41-50
Type of schooling	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Public	Grammar
Academic achievement	GCSE	'A' level	'A' Level	'A'Level	NNEB
Environment	Very rural	Small village	Very rural	Large village	Small village
Own children	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Length of childminding experience	12 years	4 years	8 years	5 years	7 ½ years
Any other employment	Yes School governor	No	No	No	No
Past career	-	Family Support Worker	Legal secretary	Nanny	Pre-school worker
Attendance at tutorials	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Use of on-line forums	2-3 times a week	No	Daily	No	Course activities only

	K	L	M	N	O
Age	31-40	41-50	31-40	51-60	41-50
Type of schooling	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Comprehensive	Secondary modern	Secondary modern
Academic achievement	GCSE	GCSE	NNEB	NVQ 3	'A' Level
Environment	Small village	Large village	Small village	Large village	Large village
Own children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of childminding experience	6 years	3 years	2 years	8 ½ years	14 years
Any other employment	No	No	No	No	No
Past career	-	Retail	Nanny	Cook	Bank clerk
Attendance at tutorials	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Use of on-line forums	Course activities only	No	No	Weekly	Weekly

	P	Q	R	S
Age	41-50	41-50	41-50	41-50
Type of schooling	Secondary modern	Secondary high	Secondary modern	Comprehensive
Academic achievement	GCSE	SVQ 3	GCSE	GCSE
Environment	Small village	Small village	Small village	Large village
Own children	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Length of childminding experience	17 years	9 years	12 years	19 years
Any other employment	No	Yes Foster parent	No	No
Past career		Children's home carer		None
Attendance at tutorials	No	No	Yes	Yes
Use of on-line forums	2-3 time a week	No	Daily	Course activities only

APPENDIX 6

Illustrative vignettes of childminders interviewed, showing particular characteristics and approaches to reflection

CHILDMINDER B

Background

B is female, 41 – 50 years old and has been a childminder for 19 years. She started childminding when her two children were pre-schoolers, and continues to childmind because she enjoys having young children around and also because she believes that it is important for parents to have childcare choices. She has championed childminding locally, as offering care and education equitable to other forms of childcare and was one of a small band of childminders selected by her local training provider to provide peer-led training when the EYFS was introduced as a mandatory curriculum for all children between the ages of 0 – 5. She is undertaking the FDEY 'to keep her brain active' and to future-proof herself if the government bring in the need for childminders to be qualified.

Reflective practices

B primarily makes use of family and friends when reflecting on her practice. Her daughter has just finished her teacher training and is working in a Foundation Stage Unit in another part of the country, giving B the opportunity to reflect on her practice with a family member who is knowledgeable about early years practice. B considers that she does not have a lot of time to reflect with others, and is quite happy with her current reflective practices. She feels that her involvement with other trainers, reading practitioner magazines and talking with her daughter is sufficient to enable her to reflect on her day-to-day practice. In addition she is not a habitual user of computers and so lacks confidence with the technology to engage with others online as well as having limited confidence in her academic ability to express herself clearly when posting messages. As a result she only takes part (at a minimum level) in compulsory module-related reflective activities.

Key points to note in relation to reflective practices

- Use of existing informal networks for reflection.
- Minimal engagement with on-line reflective activities

CHILDMINDER C

Background

C is female, 41 – 50 years old and has been a childminder for 5 years. She started childminding because she could not find childcare for her own children when she needed to return to work due to the breakdown of her marriage. Childminding has been a career of necessity, rather than choice. She is ambitious and is studying to enable her to move out of childminding and into a more recognized professional role. C admitted that she does not see herself as a 'typical' childminder and that she considers herself to be 'a cut above other childminders'.

Reflective Practices

C is happy with her childminding practice and doesn't really see the need to change it. As far as she is concerned the parents are happy with the provision, and she sees few gains in reflecting on her practice, beyond the requirement – as a Network childminder - to reflect with her Network Co-ordinator. She has made an active choice not to use the module forums or tutor group forums, unless they are compulsory and systematic, more in-depth reflection on practice is reserved for assignments. She commented that she is not against reflection, and her view is that she will be a more reflective practitioner when employed in a role that challenges her.

Key points to note in relation to reflective practices

- Reflecting on childminding practice is a reactive, not proactive process
- Reflection not valued within daily practice

CHILDMINDER E

Background

E is female, 31 – 40 years old and has been a childminder for 6 ½ years. She started childminding when she had her own children as she did not want other people looking after them while she went out to work. E typifies the stereotype of childminders as carers and 'stay-at-home earth mothers', rather than 'educators'. E is surrounded by family members who (in her words!) are much cleverer than she is and she constantly wonders if she can really get a degree. This feeling of inferiority extends itself to her view of herself as a childcarer and she is very self-deprecating. E has been a student of mine from the start of the FDEY and I have seen evidence of a growth in confidence (albeit a slow growth over 4 years) as she has gained an understanding of why she does what she does, and why her approach to practice is so successful.

Reflective practices

As an ex-state-registered nurse, E had already been introduced to models of reflection as a way of developing practice. She is enthusiastic and self-motivated and has embraced the opportunities to learn how to use the reflective tools introduced within the module materials effectively. Her discussions within tutorials and assignments are reflective and there is evidence that theory-informed systematic reflection is (slowly) transforming her view of herself as a professional. However, as her tutor, I am constantly needing to present evidence to her that she is reflecting; she seems unaware that what comes naturally to her is a skill – definitely a 'blind area'. E prefers to talk to people face-to-face so her choices for reflective partners are limited by this preference. She has a good friend who works in a playgroup, and she discusses practice with her; she also bounces ideas off of her husband. Time to use the family computer is limited and so E finds it difficult to take part in online forums.

Key points to note in relation to reflective practices

- Already a reflective practitioner
- Preference for face-to-face reflection

- Reflection is key to transformative learning

CHILDMINDER G

Background

G is female, aged between 31 – 40 and has been childminding 4 years. G started childminding to provide a friend for her son who is (and will be) an only child. Like C, G does not see childminding as a long-term option and only intends to childmind while her son is young enough to need her at home full-time. She is studying to gain a qualification that will enable her to go out to work, rather than working from home.

Reflective practices

G commented that she usually engages in solo reflection. She has a notepad where she writes down things that happen in the day and she uses this as an aide memoire to her own reflections when writing up the daily diary for parents. She engages with the online forums for the module and uses the posts to inform her thinking about her own practice. She considers that she doesn't engage directly with others to reflect on her practice, but rather she feeds off of others. When she engages in reflection on practice she is drawing on the discussion she has had, or has read about with others.

Key points to note in relation to reflective practices

- Engages in solo reflection
- Uses opportunities, such as the daily diary, to reflect on daily practice as she writes about it

CHILDMINDER H

Background

H is female, 31 – 40 years old and has been childminding for 8 years. She started childminding for similar reasons to many other childminders in that she wanted to stay at home with her children while they were young. However, she enjoyed childminding so much that she decided to make childminding a career choice. She has immersed herself in the childminding community, both locally and more widely through engagement with online childminding forums. She uses technology extensively to keep in touch with other childminders around the country and is an avid forum user. She is very positive about childminding as an equal form of childcare and has had various support roles over the past few years; mentoring new childminders in her county and, more recently, taking on the role of mentor and assessor for childminders on the EYP programme.

Reflective practices

At the start of the FDEY H reflected with other childminders in her local childminding group. However, as she has become more knowledgeable through academic study she has found it increasingly difficult to reflect with others who are

not 'on her wavelength', preferring to seek out people who will challenge her thinking about practice. H appears to have made the transition to becoming a reflective practitioner and reflection is a proactive process with H making the time to reflect on specific aspects of her practice, such as how she communicates with parents. H uses technology to keep in touch with other childminders throughout her childminding day via a 'chat' forum that is open on her laptop.

Key points to note in relation to reflective practices

- Use of on-line forums to reflect on practice
- Reflection takes place with other childminders, particularly those undertaking OU study
- Proactive reflection on specific aspects of practice

APPENDIX 7

Reflective practice questionnaire

Please read the attached sheets before answering this questionnaire

If you feel unhappy about supplying any of the requested information, just miss the question out. Incomplete questionnaires are still of use to me. I have asked for your name so that I can carry out follow-up interviews either by telephone or face-to-face.

GENERAL INFORMATION

NAME

.....

1. Age 18-24; 25-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60; over 60 Please circle as appropriate
2. Type of schooling e.g. comprehensive, single-sex school, selective i.e. grammar or secondary modern, private, boarding school. Please be specific

.....

.....

3. Highest level of previous academic achievement? Please tick as appropriate

- GCSE or equivalent
- 'A' Level
- Degree
- Post-degree
- No formal qualifications
- Other (give details)

- 4a) What type of environment do you work in?

- Very rural (middle of nowhere!)
- Small village
- Large village
- Town
- City

Please state if there are other childminders local to you YES / NO

- 4b) Has own children / does not have own children *Circle as appropriate*
- 5a) How many years have you been working in childcare?
- 5b) How many years have you been working as a childminder, if different
.....
- 5c) I am currently working solely as a childminder, and do not have employment /
volunteer within another type of childcare provision

YES / NO (Delete as appropriate)
- 5d) Past career (if applicable).....

VIEWS ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

- 6a) How often do you reflect on your practice, since undertaking your current
course
of study (see accompanying information sheet for definition of reflection)?
Circle your answer

Just about Just about Just about Less than Never
Every day every week every month once a
month
- 6b) Does this differ to how often you reflected on your practice before undertaking
your current course of study?

YES / NO
Please explain how

.....

.....

.....
7. How important do you feel it is to reflect on your practice?
*Circle your answer on a scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being very important, 4 fairly
important, 3 neither important or unimportant, 2, fairly unimportant and 1 being
not at all important*

54321

Give reasons for your choice

.....

.....

.....

INTERACTION WITH OTHERS

8. How important do you feel it is to reflect on your practice with others?
Circle your answer on a scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being very important, 4 fairly important, 3 neither important or unimportant, 2, fairly unimportant and 1 being not at all important

54321

Give reasons for your choice

.....

.....

.....

.....

9. When reflecting on what you do, who do you discuss your practice with? (This might, for example, be asking how the person feels an activity went or discussing how you could improve on your initial meetings with parents)

Please tick all that apply

- a. another childminder

☐
- b. your partner

☐
- c. your children

☐
- d. minded children

☐
- e. parent/s of minded children

☐

f. tutor

g. other (please state)

9b Give reasons for your choices in 9a and indicate what you would reflect on with them

10. When do you reflect on your practice?
For example: during an activity, at the end of an activity, when asked to as part of my study etc.
Please give as full an answer as you can

11a) What contact do you have with other OU students (childminders or otherwise)?

Please tick all that apply

Type of contact	Daily	2-3 times a week	Weekly	Monthly	Only when I have an issue to discuss	Never
Telephone						
E-mail						
First Class conference						
Letter						
Face-to-face						
Other (please state)						

11b) What contact do you have with other childminders (non-OU students)

Please tick all that apply

Type of contact	Daily	2-3 times a week	Weekly	Monthly	Only when I have an issue to discuss	Never
Telephone						
E-mail						
On-line forum						
Letter						
Face-to-face						
Other (please state)						

11c) What contact do you have with people working within childcare who are not childminders and not OU students?

Please tick all that apply

Type of contact	Daily	2-3 times a week	Weekly	Monthly	Only when I have an issue to discuss	Never
Telephone						
E-mail						
On-line forum						
Letter						
Face-to-face						
Other (please state)						

12. Which of the above methods do you use to reflect on your practice?
Please state methods and give reasons for your choice

.....

.....

.....

TUTORIAL SUPPORT

13. Do you attend the tutorials that are part of your current study?

Please circle as appropriate YES NO

If you do not attend tutorials please go to question 15.

14. Within tutorials, what helps you to reflect on your practice?

15.

Circle your answer on a scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being very important 4 fairly important, 3 neither important or unimportant, 2, fairly unimportant and 1 being not at all important

Whole group discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Small group discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Coffee break	5	4	3	2	1
Other (please state)	5	4	3	2	1

ROLE OF COURSE MATERIALS

16. Focusing on the course materials, what helps you to reflect on your practice?

Circle your answer on a scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being very important 4 fairly important, 3 neither important or unimportant, 2, fairly unimportant and 1 being not at all important

Reading the course materials	5	4	3	2	1
Taking notes	5	4	3	2	1
Completing activities	5	4	3	2	1
Other (please state)	5	4	3	2	1

16. How well do you feel the course assignments help you to reflect on your practice?

Circle your answer on a scale of 1 - 5, with 5 being very helpful and 1 being not at all helpful

Very helpfulFairly helpfulNeither helpful norNot very helpfulNot at all helpful

Give reasons for your choice

FURTHER COMMENTS

17. Is there anything else that you feel helps, or would help, you to reflect on your practice?
Please give details

18. Is there anything within the course that stops you from being able to reflect on your practice?
Please give details

19. Is there anything outside the course that stops you from being able to reflect on your practice?

Please give details

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and I look forward to hearing from you,

Please indicate if you are willing to take part in a follow-up interview to discuss any issues arising from your answers.

I am willing / am not willing to take part in a follow-up interview.

My name and contact details are:

IF YOU KNOW OF ANY OTHER CHILDMINDERS WHO ARE UNDERTAKING STUDY WITH THE OPEN UNIVERSITY, I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN SENDING THEM A QUESTIONNAIRE

I know of other childminders who may be interested in taking part in the research. Their contact details are:

Please return questionnaires to:

Sue
 or by email to:

by if possible although this research is ongoing until the end of the year in an evolving form, so please send it, even if you cannot meet the suggested date

In case of auerv my telephone number is or e-mail:

Childminders doing distance-learning study: Engaging in reflection with others and becoming a reflective practitioner

APPENDIX 8

The reflective practitioner

Working with children is a skilled job that requires a love of children and a good understanding of the issues that can affect their lives. You need to be able to change and adapt to the many demands on you, often at very short notice!

Understanding what is meant by being 'a reflective practitioner'

The term 'reflective practitioner' is quite new to the childcare profession and can be quite daunting to some people.

'Reflective practice' means thinking about and critically analysing your practice, actions and work with the intention of changing and improving what you do.

Being reflective means that you make time to think about your work and how you change or improve what you do.

Being reflective is a learning process as it helps you to increase your understanding and learning skills. It will mean that you can recognise your strengths, yet at the same time understand and accept that you have weaknesses, or things that you could do better. Being reflective should result in you offering a better service to the children that you care for and to their families.

If you are reflective you:

- Are contemplative, thoughtful and consider carefully what you do and why you are doing it
- Are analytical about all aspects of your work; you have a logical approach to what you do and can be critical of yourself and how you do things
- Ask yourself specific questions about your work such as those shown below
 - Where can I find out more about ...?
 - Why didn't this activity work?
 - How can I make this better?
 - Who could help me do this?
 - What might happen if I did this?

(Adapted from Riddall-Leech, S (2006) *Diploma in Home-based Childcare*, Oxford, Heinemann)

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APPENDIX 9

Positions on the Insider / outsider researcher continuum (Le Gallais, 2008)

Time frame	Position on the continuum	Potential benefits and pitfalls of role/experience on EdD research
1983 - present	Range of roles within the private and voluntary sector (in addition to those specified within this Table), including taking on committee roles, playbus volunteer and a leader within the Guide and Scout movement <u>Peer within PVI sector</u>	Understanding and appreciation of the PVI sector, and the context childminders work within <i>Provides credibility</i> Potential to be influenced by own preconceptions
1983 – 1996	Childminder <u>Peer to the respondents</u>	Understanding of uniqueness of childminding role. <i>Childminder respondents may be more honest in their responses</i> May put own interpretation to the fore and assume understanding of individual childminder perspectives
1986 – 1992	Chair of County Childminding Association <u>Voice for childminding peers</u>	In depth understanding of childminding perspective <i>Childminders may be more willing to take part if they feel their voice will be heard</i> Positive bias towards childminding may colour data analysis
1987 - 1995	Childminding tutor <u>Peer trainer</u>	Extensive contact with childminders allows for in depth knowledge of childminding perspective providing understanding of potential issues <i>Past/shared history with some childminder respondents may make honesty difficult</i>
1995 - 2006	Early Years tutor – tutoring on a wide range of CPD and NVQ Level 2 and 3 courses in home county <u>Trainer with local knowledge of the field; FE sector</u>	Local anecdotal knowledge of childcare field provides a basis for collection and interpretation of data <i>Childminder respondents may appreciate that the researcher is aware of the context within which they work – lends credibility</i>
2003 – present	AL for OU FDEY modules; EYP mentor and assessor; forum moderator <u>Tutor with knowledge of distant-learning mode of study; HE sector</u>	Less directly involved with local childminders, but tutorial groups are within a radius of my home county; known as an AL rather than for roles within the field <i>Tutor-student power dynamics may impact on childminder responses</i> Understanding of the challenges of distance-learning study Moving towards being an outsider researcher but local contact means have personal preconceptions of some respondents
2009 – present	Lecturer in Early Years, Open University <u>Lecturer with knowledge of module design</u>	Role taken on after data collection was completed Provides an understanding of the possibilities for supporting students to reflect on their practice within module design

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Explanation of insider-outsider perspective

The brief outline of roles I have had within the field as a whole, has been included to show how my past experiences may have impacted on my thesis, whether through the collection and analysis of data, or the practical application of my research.

Although in my current role I am an outsider researcher in that I am not working within the field as a childminder, as the Table above suggests, my experience over the past 27 years allows for an insider understanding of the childminder perspective and the unique challenges faced by childminders in reflecting on their practice.

One advantage of researching within an area I am very familiar with, and with a practitioner group I can empathise with, is the likelihood that respondents gave more honest and detailed responses (Hockey, 1993). However, it was necessary to be aware of the danger of making assumptions as to the reasons for the childminder's responses. As a counter-balance to my personal childminding knowledge and understanding, over 25 years I have worked with, and trained, hundreds of childminders. This has provided the basis for a less stereotypical view of childminders (Ely, 1991:127) than that portrayed by the media or held by those lacking an intimate knowledge of childminding.

The relationship between me, as the researcher, and the childminder, as the respondent, had the potential to be problematic. I had insider knowledge, but over the past 10-15 years I have become increasingly removed from working as a practitioner in the field and have taken on a more hierarchical role with an inherent power imbalance (Wenger, 2010). As more of an outsider there is a danger that I am out of touch with current practice, although the work-based learning nature of the modules I tutor on as an AL, goes a long way to counter this. However, this removal from the field also offered the opportunity for a more objective discussion between the childminder and a knowledgeable other with a shared history.

I have considered it important to stress my insider background as a way of establishing a relationship with the childminders taking part in the research and increasing my 'street credibility' (Robson, 2002:382) as a researcher who would put across their views sensitively and accurately. However, I have not engaged with distance-learning study as a childminder and I have not undertaken this research as a member of the childminding community. This lack of an insider perspective on the specific focus of my research allowed for objectivity within the data analysis and I consider this to be important for my credibility as a researcher and the validity of the research.

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APPENDIX 10

Message posted on E115 and E215 'Chat' and 'Discussion' forums and the FDEY national forum requesting participants in research

Hello,

I am a tutor on the Foundation Degree in Early Years (and a moderator with [REDACTED]). As part of my Doctorate I am undertaking research into how childminders on the Foundation Degree reflect on their practice, looking at when you reflect, with whom and why.

I am looking for childminders who are studying on the Foundation Degree, and who do not have other childminders living and working close by. I would also like to involve some childminders who do not use the forums, so if you know of any such childminders, I am happy for you to pass on this information.

I have particularly chosen childminders because you, generally, work alone. This may mean that there are not always people around to discuss what you are doing, whether you could do it any better, why it went well etc. Studying on a distance-learning programme can also mean studying alone, potentially making regular contact with your fellow students an issue too. I am interested to see if you find these an issue, and if so, are there any improvements that can be considered to facilitate effective reflection.

Taking part in the research would involve filling in a short questionnaire, and, possibly, follow-up telephone discussion to consider some points in more detail.

If you are interested, or would like more information, please e-mail me on [REDACTED] giving your contact details so we can have an informal chat before you commit yourself.

I look forward to hearing from you,
Many thanks
Sue

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APPENDIX 11

Information sheet to accompany questionnaire

I am looking at reflective practice and childminders. I have particularly chosen childminders because you, generally, work alone. This may mean that there are not always people around to discuss what you are doing, whether you could do it any better, why it went well etc. Studying on a distance-learning programme can also mean studying alone, potentially making regular contact with your fellow students an issue too. I am interested to see if you find these an issue, and if so, are there any improvements that can be considered.

Questions 1 - 5 give general information for me to create a profile of 'a childminder', as well as draw tentative conclusions around why and how you engage in reflective practice.

Questions 6 - 7 will give an idea as to your views on reflective practice

Questions 8 - 12 look at the importance, or not, of interaction with others when engaging in reflective practice

Questions 13 - 14 are around tutorial support

Questions 15 - 16 consider the role of the course materials

Questions 17 - 19 give you the opportunity to add any further comments

From your answers (and interviews with some of you) I hope to be able to identify some of the issues related to effective reflection, for childminders, on a distance-learning programme of study. My personal aim is to use the information gained to inform my tutoring and presentation of course material for the Foundation Degree courses supported by The Open University.

I have enclosed a leaflet for you on 'What is a reflective practitioner?' to help you understand what I mean by the term when you are filling out the questionnaire.

I hope you feel able to assist me in this project and I look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire. I would also like to reassure you that your answers will have no bearing on my marking of your assignments (for those of you in my tutorial groups) and that no personal information will be given out within the presentation of my research.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

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APPENDIX 12

From: [REDACTED]
Date: 08/01/2008 10:09:47
To: Sue White
Subject: RE: Response to your sample query

Dear Sue,
Yes, please do go ahead and forward the email to your supervisor.

There is an Ethics committee at the OU which looks at research involving OU students. The website is here <http://intranet.open.ac.uk/strategy-unit/offices/ethics/human.shtml>. You should be able to work out if your research needs to go to the Ethics cttee by following their guidelines on the web page.

Best wishes,
[REDACTED]

From: Sue White [mailto:sue_white@lineone.net]
Sent: 07 January 2008 22:22
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Response to your sample query

Dear [REDACTED]
Many thanks for your speedy response to my query.
As I understand, my supervisor was concerned with ethical issues, not the sampling. I appreciate that I will need to justify this method of selecting participants however.
May I have your permission to pass your e-mail onto my supervisor as 'proof' that I do not need to fill in any forms?
Best wishes
Sue

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]
Date: 01/07/08 16:44:15
To: sue_white@lineone.net
Cc: IET-SRPP
Subject: Response to your sample query

Dear Sue,
Following our conversation earlier I have had a chat with a fellow member of the SRPP working group and we think that you should ask the permission of the Course Team Chair/s and once granted, post a request for participants on the relevant FC notice boards.

Because you are a student we do not need to see an SRPP application from you and we do not (yet!) have any rules about gaining self selected samples from conference notice boards.

I think you may want to clarify with your supervisor why s/he did not want you to use notice boards – it may be that there were methodological concerns around using a self selected sample.

If you have any other queries please get back in touch, otherwise good luck with the student recruitment!

[REDACTED]
Student Research Manager

Centre for Institutional Research

Institute of Educational Technology

16/01/2011

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APPENDIX 13

MARKED UP INTERVIEW SCRIPT - EXTRACT

MARKED UP INTERVIEW SCRIPT - EXTRACT

Recording was carried out by telephone on a Saturday morning when no children were present. A telephone 2 way recorder was used to capture the conversation. I also wrote some notes as we went of key issues brought up. The childminder in this interview is on the last course in the Foundation Degree in Early Years with the Open University

A list of typed questions were used to focus the discussion.

Conversation started with a general chat about life in general to put both H and myself at ease.

Gave a brief background to the purpose of the research; to look at whether there is any truth in the research that says you must have someone to reflect with, to reflect on your practice , and, if it is true, how the OU can address the issue for childminders and minimise the difficulty for people who work on their own.

S The first thing we need to get sorted is to check that we are on the same wavelength, as to what we mean by reflective practice. So I have to ask you, what it actually means to you.

H What it actually means to me is writing TMAs!! *Lots of laughter*
Seriously, what it means to me is analysing why I do what I do, probably continuously actually. Unfortunately what it also means is analysing what every other childminder does.

S What do you mean, unfortunately?

H Well I no longer go to my local childminding group as I am not prepared for the children to experience what goes on there.

S Right so, it's had a knock-on effect – sort of to what you think about practice?

H Yes, and I just can't agree with it

S That must be quite isolating then.

H Very, very isolating. We're just not on the same wavelength.

S I have to say that came out in your questionnaire actually, and it intrigued me. I have to say it can be quite a problem. I assume you are in quite a rural location, because so am I up here, and actually that can be a problem. If everyone is on a different wavelength.....

H It is a problem but I pick and choose the contact I have. I do the training with them in the evening , but I don't go to the daytime meetings. I'll give you an example of why not.....they had a meeting and decided not to offer messy play because it would take too long to clear up.....!!

S Interesting.....

H Do you see what I mean? If they can't clear up with a room full of about 30 people, how on earth are they going to offer it in their own home?

S One can only assume they don't

H Do you see what I mean?

S Yes I do.....

H So that's a very good example of why I can't reflect with them, because I don't like their attitude. For them minding isn't about the children, its about them

Comment [S1]: Negative to reflecting in that no longer content with 'the old order'

Comment [S2]: Recurring theme = same wavelength v important

Comment [S3]: Drawn into agreeing but almost felt like I was being tested to see if my credentials fitted - and therefore worth talking to me!

Comment [S4]: Evidence that need to be on same wavelength to reflect with others

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been quite sad in places too.....the stuff she's been coming out with,
I've been thinking...oh my word...

S Oh?

H Like she picked up the baby doll and said 'Oh this dolly's been naughty, shall I
smack its bottom?' erm.....I'm thinking 'no'!!

S She's obviously watched too much TV, like um.....

H Oh I don't know.....mind you it's been very interesting because I
haven't had a child student before.....quite different.....can't really reflect
with them when they are only used to virtual babies.... they just have no
idea.....

S No, they're only used to flour babies aren't they?

H I'm teaching them about childcare but.....not reflecting.....

Comment [S15]: Suggests that there needs to be more than 'in the same place' - must have common understanding? ..

S So what sort of things would you say you reflect on?

H Um, what sort of things do I reflect on? The uselessness of the National Curriculum!! No seriously, at this stage of the game.....4 years on (since start of FD study).....overhauling and pulling into place all the paperwork.....getting it all out of my head.....even with the few children I am allowed to have.....its hard to keep it all up there and I want to do the focused planning.....what I'm doing is way above what it needs to be done. I'm not sure why I'm doing it, apart from to prove to myself that I can do it.....

Comment [S16]: Impact of study has been to formalize reflection?

S Ummm.....

H I'm spending more and more time in the evenings, which I wouldn't have done before. I am also reflecting on my relationship with parents and encouraging them to be in the loop.....trying to get them into the loop so that planning includes them. I also think the other issue is equality of opportunity.....outside of my setting.....and getting parents to take it into their home. I think more and more we need to think, as childcare workers, about challenging parents. Since doing these courses I think, more and more, that our role is to make them think.....I see part of my reflective practising (sic) - is that a word - well it is now

Comment [S17]: Course has an impact on 'why' and reflection has created a need to 'spread the word'

S Sounds good!

H I see my role, as an equity point of view, as moving things out of my setting and into the wider forum.

This is a shift, as a direct result of the course, this last course (E215) particularly. Another one that I have also reflected on is hidden disabilities.....I'm hotter on it. The work we did in E215 on the UNCRC.....I really engaged with it and took it to the next level

S And was this as a result of the course activities or outside of it?

H Partly.....I really engaged with it but I wouldn't have known about it without the course activities.....as you know there was quite a lot on it.....but also it impacted on my own parenting as my son is autistic. I have been able to go into the school and start that Article 12 states..... This has been very useful, particularly when they tried to stop my son's playtime.....

Comment [S18]: Suggestion that the purpose of the course is to provide the theoretical background to the reflection, rather than helping with the reflection itself?

S Yes it can be useful at times.....

H Yes, telling them that they can't take away playtime as 'my son has a right to play under Article.....!! And I don't want him to have to do homework - I think there should be time for other things.....

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S Would you say then that the training, the courses you have undertaken have had that impact on you then really?

H Yes, a direct result.....

I'm on a couple of Yahoo forums for other childminders nationwide

S Umm.....

H There is actually a separate forum on Yahoo for OU childminders and they are incredibly helpful.....we do support each other as much as we can.....

S I have to say that is really useful to know.....

H It's not widely publicised.....as you can imagine there is quite a lot of slagging off of tutors.....!!

Comment [55]: Training impacting on practice, as a result of reflection?

Comment [56]: E-learning + Billy Salmon

Comment [57]: Conversational style (alongside a very confident c/m) seemed to result in a discussion that was honest?

Digressed into how childminders can get access to the group as it is a closed group At this point I reminded H that I was a tutor, and so I was interested in the Yahoo group from that point of view, but also that I had been a childminder for many years. H said she had assumed I was otherwise I wouldn't be researching 'childminders'!! H asked about my background in childminding and we discussed my 'credentials' almost - looking at what I had done at a national and local level and why I wanted to research childminders

Comment [58]: I didn't want any confidentiality issues to come up here

Comment [59]: In view of H's quite strong views about c/m not being understood, I felt this was an important point for her to see that this research had some potential benefit for c/m

H It is an incredibly helpful forum, particularly for those coming on behind. Those of us who are on E215 can help them.....its also support away from FirstClass.....it clarifies so much.....I mean, having to look at the EYCLOs for E115.....going through them with the newbies, has helped me to put my own evidence right into perspective and I got a 93 for that assignment.....

S Hmm.....that's really positive isn't it

H So that is really really supportive in a way that I wouldn't have expected.

S Yes that's true isn't it?

H When you say that childminders are quite isolated studiers.....actually we're not.....we're used to sorting things out for ourselves.....and there's actually a quite vibrant, on-line community.....we're all trying to raise the standard.....

Comment [S10]: Should I have refused this information? If, yes, why; does it affect validity in that I owned up to my passion for raising the profile of c/m?

Comment [S11]: Does this complement or negate value of OU on-line support systems - tutors can access latter - is this a problem (seems so)

Comment [S12]: Value of being the more knowledgeable other on own reflective practice - having to explain own practice, helps to reflect on it. Opposite way round to research which looks at the gain for those new to the community of practice

I take funded children and they get a much better deal out of me than in a nursery.....for a start they are with me for 8-10 hours a day so they are getting that much 'education'.....I don't say that's it... you've had your 2 ½ hours now go and watch TV for the rest of the day.....and I'm going to get on with my OU studying.....

S Wouldn't that be nice (lots of laughter)

Comment [S13]: Very discrete community of practice On-line provides instant support and eliminates geographical distance as an issue.

Brought the conversation back to the research at this point because we were moving too much into a general chat

S Obviously you do do a lot of reflection; you've obviously got an NVQ student as well, you're obviously doing a lot.....

H This week I've also had a 15 year old work experience child from the school.....it's been hilarious.....well, it has and it hasn't.....it's

Comment [S14]: Watch language - too many 'obvious' comments here!

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Digression into discussion about son and difficulties with the school.

H Reflective practitioning (sic) has an impact on me as a childminder but also on own parenting. Since doing the Foundation Degree I find that my reflection is deeper. I'm prepared to argue with people more and put across my point of view. I also think about why and what my actions mean. To give you an example, I will sit and do my paperwork all through the evening, but I choose to do that, I'm my own boss. But if I worked in a nursery or playgroup I wouldn't want to do that, I haven't got the same responsibility and I would want to forget work and go home. There needs to be a work/life balance. And that's it with the childrenwe're not treating them fairly, we're not getting them ready for a healthy adult life.....Anyway, that's set me off on my hobbyhorse.....but I reflect like this as a matter of course now.....

S Yes..... and that's deep level reflection that, isn't it?

H (laughter) yes, a little too deep don't you think?

Short banter exchange

Comment [S19]: What is meant by this? How does it fit into the levels of reflection (van Manen)

Look for evidence within interview of different levels of reflection